

**WWII**

**KAMIKAZE: FANATICAL PILOTS WERE PREPARED TO DIE FOR THEIR EMPEROR**

# Bringing History to Life

## Battle of Midway

US sank Japan's largest aircraft carrier

## Attack on Pearl Harbor

US declared war on Japan

# PACIFIC WAR



### 19,000 US MARINES ON GUADALCANAL

Allies halted the Imperial Japanese Army's advance

### MACARTHUR'S RETURN

Violent battles preceded the invasion of the Philippines



### STALINGRAD OF THE EAST


British were desperate to hold Indian mountain village

**JAPANESE MILITARY ATTEMPTED COUP IN WAR'S LAST MOMENTS**









*The attack on Pearl Harbor  
was totally unexpected  
and took over 2,000  
American lives.*

# Japan pulls the US into the war

On the morning of Sunday 7th December, 1941, 183 Japanese aircraft fly across the quiet American naval base of Pearl Harbor. After a few minutes, oil stocks and airfields are in flames, and several of the United States' largest battleships are heading towards the bottom of the harbour.

The aim of the Japanese surprise attack is to hobble the United States once and for all, giving the empire a free hand to continue its conquests in Asia. But the assault has the opposite effect. As the shock subsides,

Americans swear revenge and begin to methodically bring the mighty nation to its knees.

Weapons factories spit out Hellcat and Dauntless planes, and in California, the yards launch one huge aircraft carrier after another. By the autumn of 1942, the US are ready to counterattack and invade the Japanese base on the South Sea at Guadalcanal.

*Pacific War* follows the conflict in the Pacific, where dark clouds gather over the Kingdom of the Sun until two atom bombs drop in August 1945.



*Tanks were effective against the Japanese defences, but large parts of the jungle were soft and swampy, where the vehicles could not go.*

# 1941-45





## 1941

### **6 Death comes from the skies**

Japan launches surprise attack on the US Navy at Pearl Harbor.

## 1942

### **16 Japan clears peninsula of Allied forces**

The US struggles to hold on to its last foothold in the Philippines.

### **26 US sinks Japan's biggest aircraft carrier**

In the Battle of Midway, Americans regain control of the Pacific.

### **38 Allies put the brakes on Japan's forward march**

The Imperial Army is ousted from the tropical island of Guadalcanal.

## 1943

### **48 Strike team must avenge Pearl Harbor**

Americans plot to take out Japan's top naval officer.

## 1944

### **58 Indian ridge is Stalingrad of the East**

Brits fight desperately to keep control of Kohima.

### **68 Bases become soldiers' second home**

Military folk play softball and dance with chorus girls.

### **76 Americans invade the Philippines**

Violent battles pave the way for the Allies in the Pacific.

### **86 Japan's pilots fly to their deaths**

Thousands of Japanese volunteer as kamikaze pilots.

## 1945

### **94 Captive in hell**

Japanese prison camps tried to strip the humanity from PoWs.

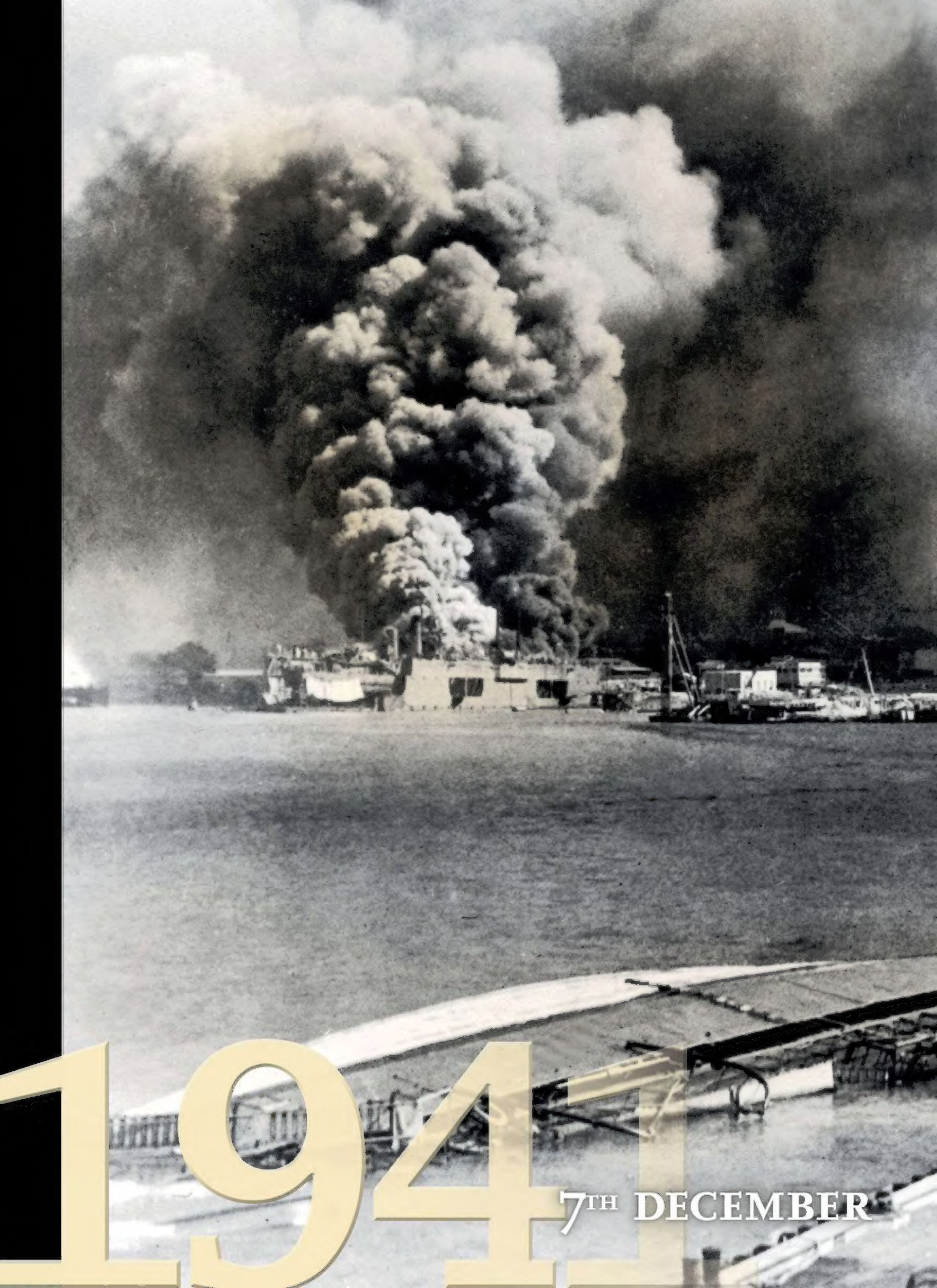
### **104 Atom bombs end the war**

Americans reduce two Japanese cities to ashes.

### **114 Officers fight to the death**

Japanese military attempts coup in war's dying moments.







1941

7<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER





•  ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR •  •

# DEATH COMES FROM THE SKIES

On a peaceful Sunday morning in December, the Pearl Harbor naval base wakes up to the sound of falling bombs. Waves of Japanese planes roll over the US Pacific Navy and transform the port into a graveyard in just a few hours. The United States has been drawn into World War II.

*No one was expecting a Japanese attack, so most of the personnel at Pearl Harbor had the weekend off and slept late.*



## THE STAGE IS SET



WWII is raging in Europe, while on the other side of the globe Japan is expanding its territory. The US maintains its policy of neutrality, but introduces economic sanctions to slow the Japanese advance. The Japanese believe that a confrontation with the US is unavoidable and decide to strike a decisive first blow.



**C**LOUDS LAY LIKE A THICK BLANKET OVER THE PACIFIC as 183 Japanese planes approached the Hawaiian Islands on 7th December, 1941. Beneath him, Commander Mitsuo Fuchida caught a glimpse of the ocean, and when the pilots in their "Kate" (Nakajima B5N) bombers finally broke through the cloud cover, a white surf appeared below them: the island of Oahu.

Before long Fuchida could see Pearl Harbor. Through his binoculars, the commander assessed the sleepy naval base and took in the American battleships. All eight were in port – and not a single enemy plane was on the wing.

At 07.49 Fuchida told his radio operator, Norinobu Mizuki, to send the agreed code signal to the other

planes. "To! To! To" crackled the signal – a shortening of the Japanese word *totsugeki* – attack!

First target was the Wheeler Field Airbase, 15 kilometres north-west of Pearl Harbor. From above, "Val" (Aichi D3A) dive bombers dived and dropped their cargo, while low-flying Mitsubishi A6M "Zero" fighters opened fire with machine guns that set buildings, hangars and US aircraft alight on the ground. Wheeler Field's commander Colonel William J Flood later described how the Japanese fighters flew so low that "I could even see the gold in their teeth".

The unthinkable had happened to the Americans: the Pacific Fleet was under attack in its home base, and the United States had been forced into World War II.

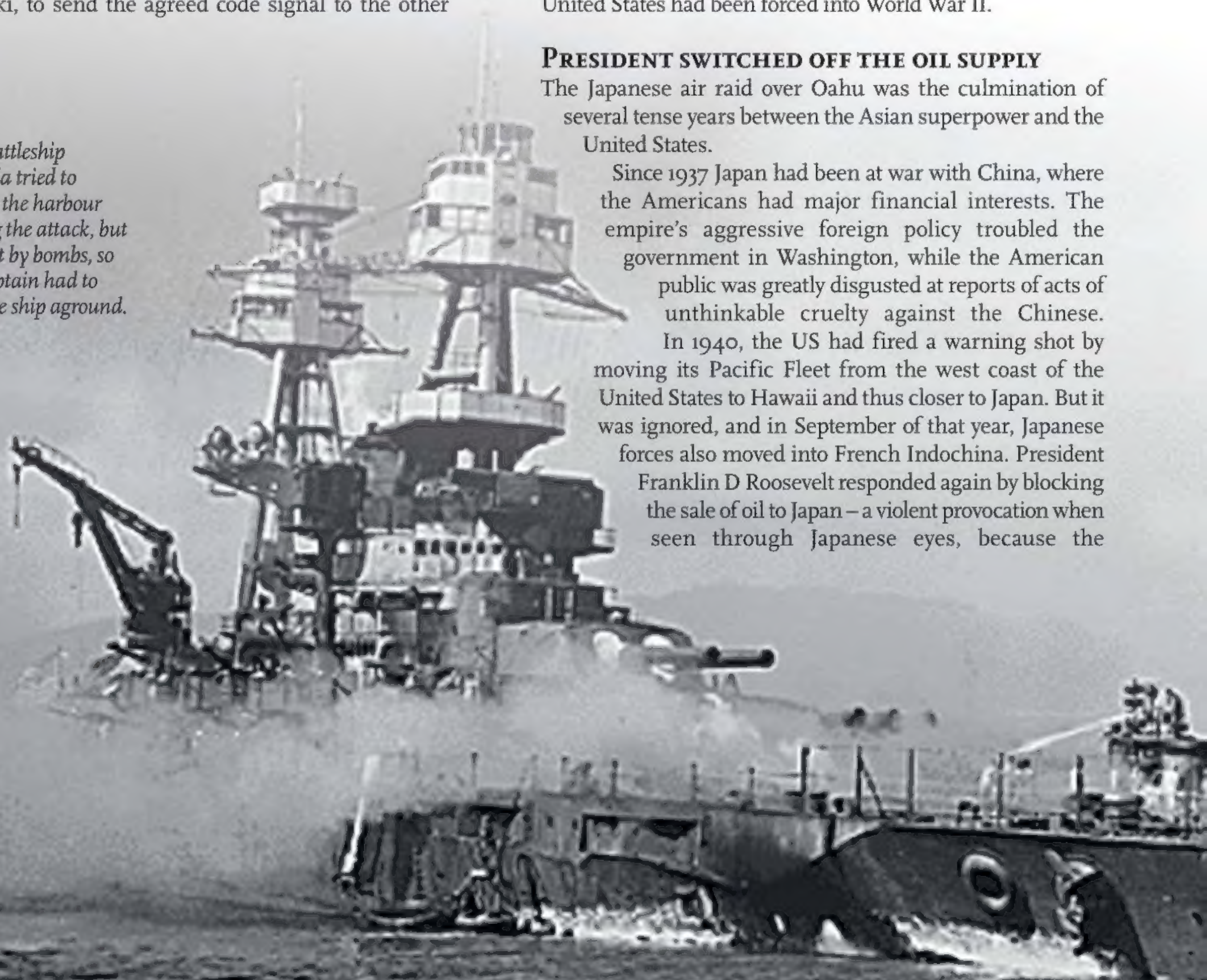
### PRESIDENT SWITCHED OFF THE OIL SUPPLY

The Japanese air raid over Oahu was the culmination of several tense years between the Asian superpower and the United States.

Since 1937 Japan had been at war with China, where the Americans had major financial interests. The empire's aggressive foreign policy troubled the government in Washington, while the American public was greatly disgusted at reports of acts of unthinkable cruelty against the Chinese.

In 1940, the US had fired a warning shot by moving its Pacific Fleet from the west coast of the United States to Hawaii and thus closer to Japan. But it was ignored, and in September of that year, Japanese forces also moved into French Indochina. President Franklin D Roosevelt responded again by blocking the sale of oil to Japan – a violent provocation when seen through Japanese eyes, because the

*The battleship Nevada tried to escape the harbour during the attack, but was hit by bombs, so the captain had to run the ship aground.*





1884-1943



NAME

**ISOROKU YAMAMOTO**

TITLE

ADMIRAL AND COMMANDER OF THE JAPANESE FLEET

## Japanese commander feared the US's strength

Yamamoto knew the West well. The Japanese admiral studied at Harvard University in the United States, then he was appointed as a naval attaché to Washington and attended several marine conferences in London. Yamamoto's knowledge of the West made him an opponent of a war with the US because he feared its superior production facilities.

But when a war seemed inevitable, the admiral loyally started planning. He believed that the best chance of success lay in a pre-emptive devastating strike that would break the US Pacific fleet. As a keen advocate of aircraft carriers, the Japanese commander preferred to carry out the attack by plane.

Yamamoto had an almost sacred status among the Japanese public. When the Americans managed to shoot down his plane in 1943, the authorities waited a month before publishing the announcement.

➤ Studied at Harvard University in 1919-21.

➤ Commander-in-chief of the Japanese fleet from 1939.



country's poor mineral resources left it deeply dependent on US oil supplies.

In January 1941, almost a year before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the commander of the Imperial Japanese Navy predicted the outbreak of war. Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto believed that the Japanese would destroy the American fleet to win the war on the first day.

Yamamoto had already mentally outlined a bold action against the naval base in Hawaii. It was soon fully described, and during the rest of 1941 the Japanese prepared for the attack right down to the smallest detail. The operation could only be carried out from the

air by planes from Japanese aircraft carriers, but even this method caused major problems. The depth of the water in Pearl Harbor was so low that Japanese torpedoes would hit the seabed when dropped from aircraft.

The engineers' solution was to mount wooden fins on the torpedo, which would give them extra buoyancy in the water.

Another challenge was bomb

attacks from high altitude. During the first exercises, only 10 percent of the bombs hit their targets, but intensive training and better cooperation between pilot and

bombardier bore fruit: the proportion of complete hits gradually improved to around 80 percent.

Meanwhile, a spy attached to the Japanese consulate in Honolulu tracked the Pacific Fleet's movements, the number of ships at the base and their daily routine. What he could not observe himself, he read in the paper, because the local press wrote diligently about the ships' activities. The spy also found that the base was least active on a Sunday morning.

### ATTACK FORCE CREPT INTO POSITION

In the autumn of 1941, as Japanese attack preparations entered their decisive phase, Japanese and US diplomats tried to negotiate a solution.

The Japanese demanded that the US cease all support to China and give it access to US oil supplies, while the Americans in turn demanded Japan leave China and French Indochina.

"It's an ultimatum", protested Japanese Prime Minister Hideki Tojo – and he was not going to give in to US demands.

Eventually it was clear that the time for negotiation was over, and at the end of November 1941 Japanese ships sneaked out of the naval ports in small groups. They gathered in the far north, and from here the assault fleet's six aircraft carriers and their escort waited in the raging winter sea. The route

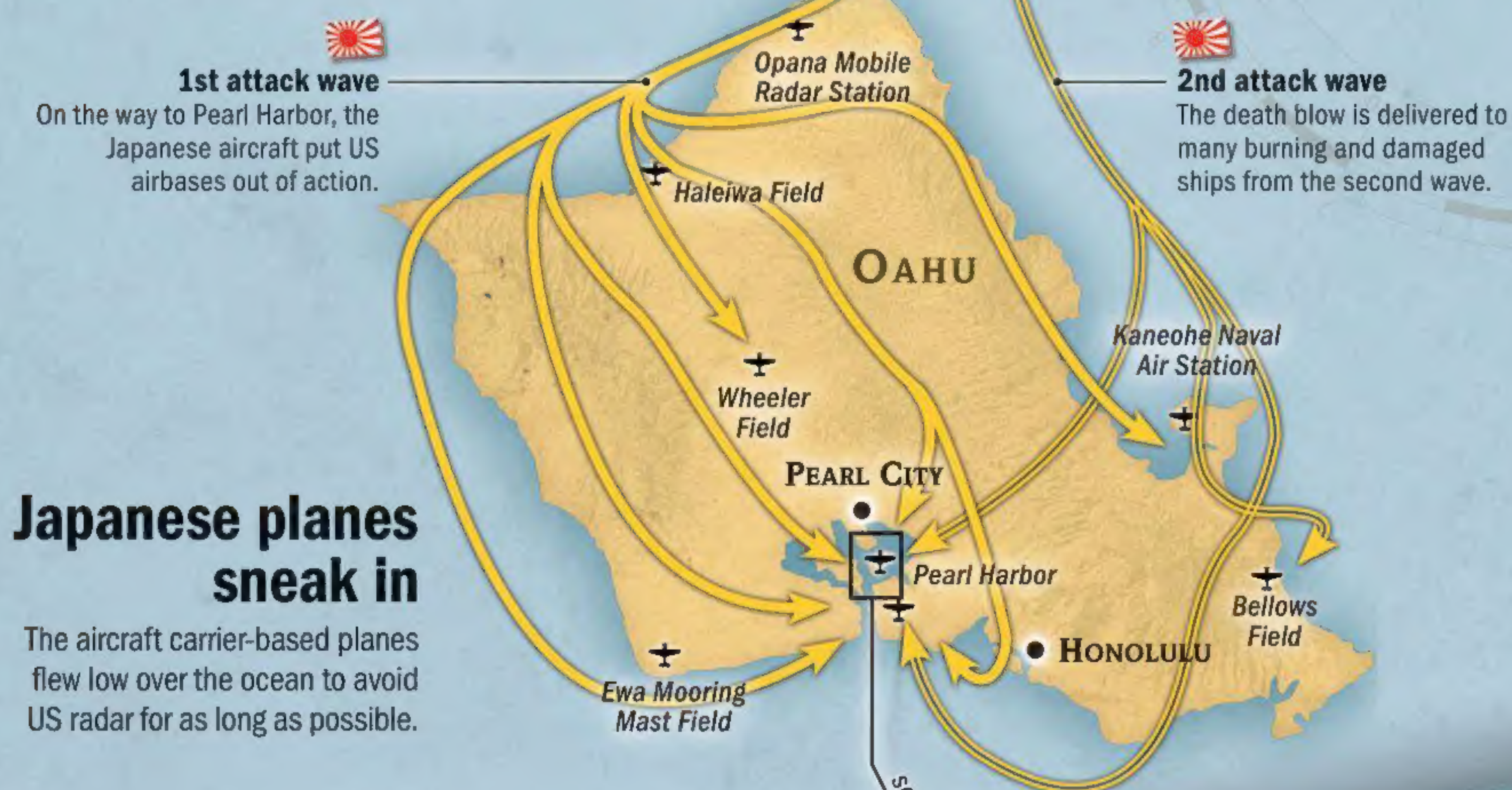


*Belts sewn by 1,000 women would bring the Japanese pilots luck.*



# The Japanese struck with no warning

Admiral Yamamoto had consciously chosen a Sunday morning for the attack as he realised that the Americans in Pearl Harbor wouldn't be prepared. While most of them were still in bed, Japanese aircraft roared across the base.



## 1 Aircraft destroyed on the ground

26 dive bombers attack the two airbases Hickam Field and Pearl Harbor Naval Air Station. The attacks must minimise the number of US aircraft able to take to the skies to threaten the operation.

## US LOSSES

FACTS

	Damaged	Sank
Battleships	4	4
Cruisers	3	-
Destroyers	4	-
Other vessels	2	4
	Damaged	Destroyed
Planes	159	169
	Wounded	Killed
Military	1,143	2,335
Civilians	35	68





## 1ST ATTACK WAVE 07.50-08.10

ZERO FIGHTERS



43

KATE TORPEDO BOMBERS



40

KATE BOMBERS

49

VAL DIVE BOMBERS



51

### MAIN OBJECTIVES:

- Sink the Pacific fleet's eight battleships.
- Eliminate Oahu's air defences, especially the 145 aircraft at the large Wheeler Field airbase.



## 2ND ATTACK WAVE 09.05-09.45

ZERO FIGHTERS



36

KATE BOMBERS



54

VAL DIVE BOMBERS

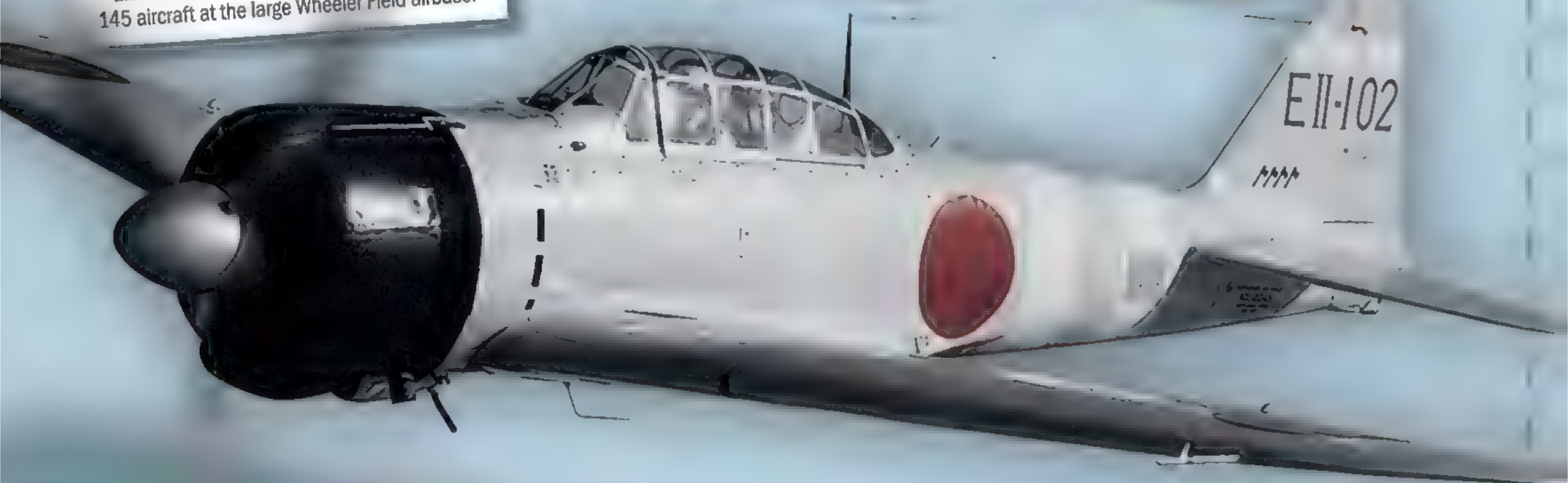


78

### MAIN OBJECTIVES:

- Sink the battleships and other naval vessels that survived the first wave.
- Make further attacks on US airbases and secondary targets.

Helmets and flight goggles were part of the Japanese pilots' standard equipment.



East Loch

Battleship Row

South-east Loch

New York

Hickam Field

## 2 Cruisers are torpedoed

16 Kate torpedo bombers divide into two groups to attack a group of cruisers north of Ford Island and along the harbour's quays. Cruisers *Helena*, *Honolulu* and *Raleigh* are damaged while the old battleship *Utah* is hit by several torpedoes and capsizes.

## 3 Battleships crippled

At low altitude, 24 Kate torpedo bombers fly to the pride of the US Pacific fleet, the anchored battleships. A group of torpedoes blow holes in the hull of the armoured titans.

## 4 Death blow struck

Rows of battleships have already been severely damaged by torpedoes, yet a few minutes later all 49 Kate bombers release their load of 800-kg armour-piercing bombs over the weakened vessels.



through the harsh waters was intended to minimise the risk of encountering any ships along the way and if any foreign vessels were discovered, the captains had orders to sink them.

The fleet was about 1,500 kilometres east of Japan when a radio message came from Admiral Yamamoto: "Niitakayama Nobore" (Climb Mount Niitaka). The signal was fleet commander Admiral Nagumo's cue to open his sealed orders.

The admiral opened a set of top-secret documents that confirmed Japan would be going to war with the United States, Britain, and Holland and confirmed the attack date.

### OFFICER IGNORED RADAR SIGNAL

At around 07.00 on Sunday, 7th December, a US radar station on the northern tip of Oahu intercepted a strong signal from

## Japan risked everything with a massive attack

The Japanese assembled the most powerful aircraft-carrier fleet ever to destroy the US naval base at Pearl Harbor once and for all.

**O**n 26th November, 1941 Japan summoned a mighty fleet. At the force's heart were the six major aircraft carriers *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Soryu*, *Hiryu*, *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*. With a total of more than 420 aircraft, the fleet was by far the strongest aircraft-carrier armada ever assembled.

As protection, the fleet had two battleships and three cruisers. A number of submarines were also included, which would be sent to Pearl Harbor in advance. Several were mini-subs, given the task of penetrating the naval base and sinking the ships that escaped the torpedoes. This part of the operation failed, however.

The fleet was under the command of the experienced but cautious Chuichi Nagumo. The admiral had been ordered to interrupt the attack if the naval force was discovered or if the plan looked unlikely to succeed.

*Activity on the Japanese aircraft carriers was hectic when the planes were about to leave.*

the ocean. But the message didn't reach any further than the duty officer. He assumed that the radar had registered six B-17 bombers, which he knew were coming from the US mainland. It meant the Americans were completely surprised when a rain of bombs began to fall over the Wheeler Field airbase. Fuel-tank explosions created a sea of fire as long rows of US fighters parked close to each other caught alight. Within minutes, detonations took place at other Oahu airbases too.

Commander Fuchida was extremely happy. As one of the most highly respected pilots in the empire, he was the ideal man to plan and carry out the operation. Fuchida combined a mild and thoughtful outlook with deadly effectiveness. The commander had coordinated all preparations for the air attack and was now in place high above the target.

At 07.53, his radio operator sent the message "Tora! Tora! Tora!" back to the assault fleet. *Tora* is Japanese for tiger, and the signal confirmed that the attack was underway and that the attackers had achieved complete surprise.

A few minutes later, the air armada reached Pearl Harbor itself. About 90 vessels of differing sizes were in the port, but Japan's key target was the row of eight heavily armoured and highly armed battleships.

The attackers considered the battleships to be more dangerous than the US's Pacific aircraft carriers, all of which were away from the harbour on this morning. By taking out all of America's battleships, Japanese leaders imagined they'd weaken the US resolve to fight – and ensure military supremacy for at least six months.

The Americans hadn't placed any torpedo nets in the harbour or put up barricades because they felt safe in Pearl Harbor. Nothing therefore prevented the Kate bombers from attacking at low altitude and dropping their load. With a white foamy spray, the five-metre torpedoes broke the water's surface, and left a wake behind as they streaked towards the anchored battleships. Shortly after, a series of explosions caused the big metal hulls to tremble.

### BATTLESHIP WENT UP IN FLAMES

On the airbase on Ford Island in the middle of the harbour basin, Captain Logan Ramsey was in the command centre when a plane flew close. At first Ramsey thought that it was one of the young American pilots who'd appeared. "Get that guy's number", the officer shouted from the room. Then

## JAPANESE ATTACK

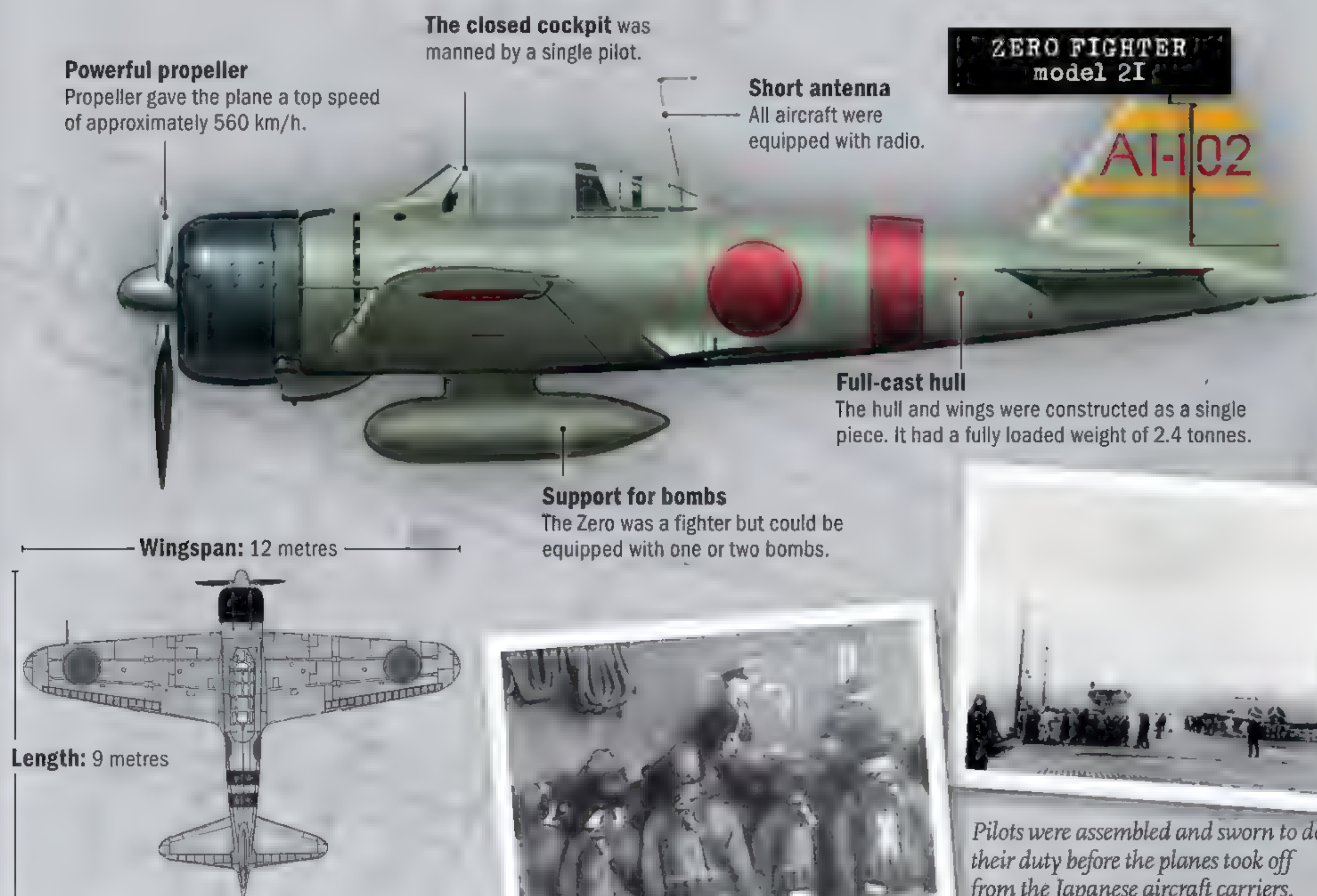
Fleet aircraft carriers	6
Battleships	2
Cruisers	3
Destroyers	9
Submarines	23

■ In addition to warships, the Japanese fleet also had eight tankers that could keep the warships supplied in high seas.



# Japanese wasps ravaged Pacific

The Japanese war industry produced over 10,000 aircraft of the type A6M Zero. The fighter was easy to control and very manoeuvrable, but had a relatively modest top speed.



FIGHTER



*Pilots were assembled and sworn to do their duty before the planes took off from the Japanese aircraft carriers.*

Ramsey heard that the diving plane had dropped a bomb. "Never mind, it's a Jap", he exclaimed and ran into the radio room where he sent the message: "AIR RAID ON PEARL HARBOR X THIS IS NOT DRILL".

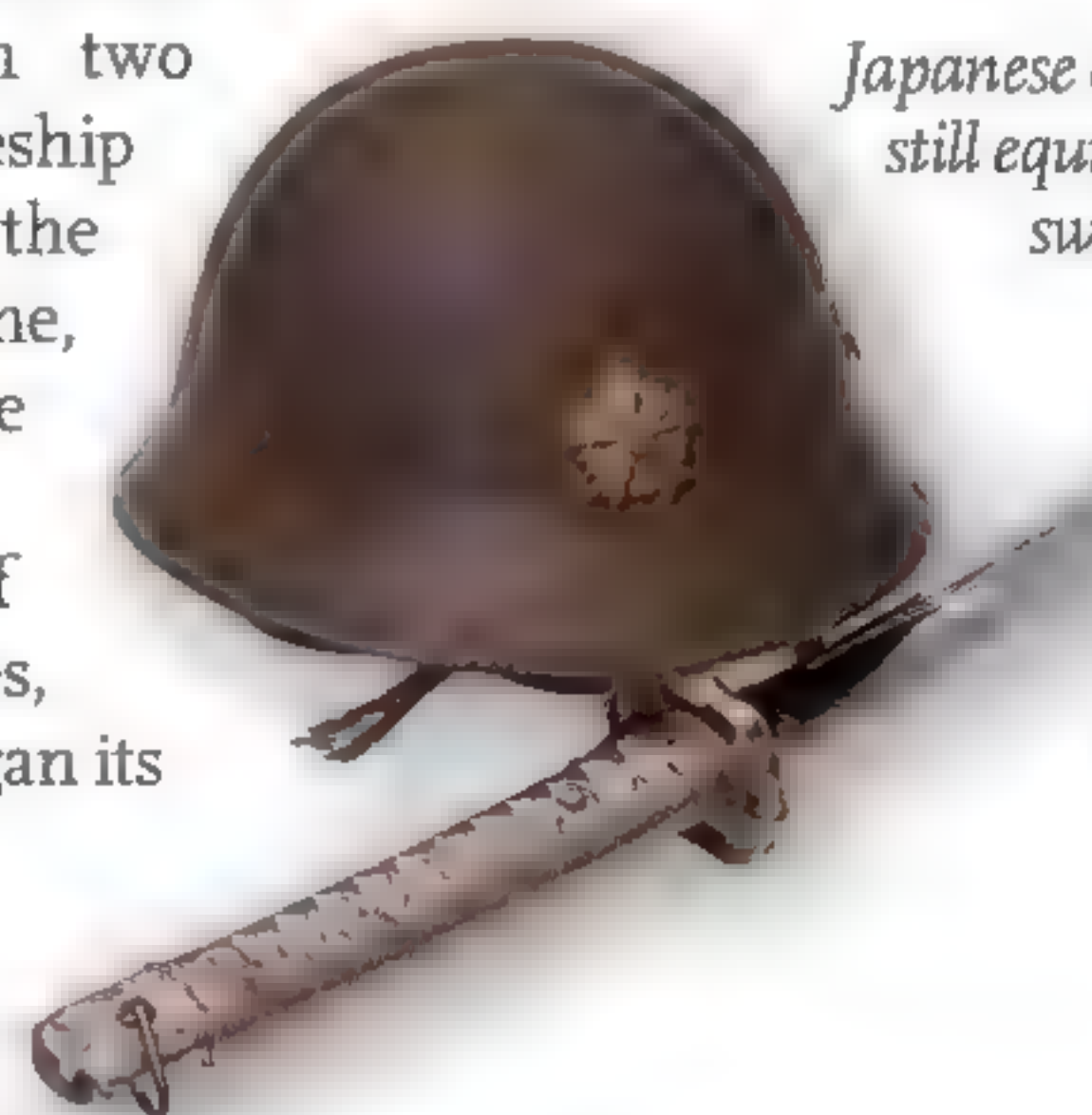
At 07.58, the message went out on all local frequencies, while Japanese aircraft swarmed around their targets. At the same time, 49 Kate bombers approached from three kilometres up, armed with 800-kg armour-piercing bombs. At about 08.00 the bombardiers pulled the triggers, and the load from each plane fell on the weakened battleships.

From his place high in the sky, Fuchida saw the glow of light from a huge explosion. A thick column of smoke and fire shot up one kilometre into the air, and a moment later his Kate bomber was buffeted by the blast. A bomb had drilled through two armoured decks on the battleship *USS Arizona* and ignited the forward ammunition magazine, which ripped the sides of the hull like a can.

Within seconds, large parts of *Arizona* were engulfed in flames, and the 185-metre-long hull began its

short journey to the bottom of the shallow harbour. Hundreds of men were trapped in the burning hot interior, and 1,177 of the *Arizona's* 1,400-man crew were killed in the biggest disaster in US naval history. High above the gruesome scenes in the port, Fuchida could see that the first attack wave had hit the American battleships and airbases hard. As the other planes returned to the aircraft carriers, he was above Pearl Harbor, ready to watch the next attack wave. 168 aircraft had taken off from the aircraft carriers one hour after the first wave and now approached rapidly from the north.

Outside the naval base, civilians had followed the dramatic scenes. Some believed that they witnessed an exercise while others feared that a Japanese landing was on its way.



*Japanese officers were still equipped with swords.*

## UNDAMAGED PLANES TOOK FLIGHT

At 09.00, the next Japanese attack wave appeared over Pearl Harbor. The Americans were over the initial shock, and now the port's anti-aircraft guns were manned. Grey-black clouds from exploding shells filled the sky around the Japanese planes, while American pilots took



the undamaged fighters to the skies.

Japanese commander Lieutenant Takashige Egusa's 78 Val dive bombers had the most difficult task. His planes had to dive through a fierce US barrier of fire from burning planes and ships to hit the battleships that had escaped the first wave of bombs.

USS *Nevada* was the only one of the eight that could still manoeuvre despite a direct hit from a torpedo. 23 Val dive bombers dropped their 250-kg bombs and after a series of explosions, *Nevada* began to take on water.

To save his ship from sinking, the captain ordered *Nevada* to beach herself.

### JAPANESE SUFFERED MINIMAL LOSSES

As the planes from the attack headed back to the north, a silence descended over Pearl Harbor. By 11.00 Fuchida flew a



*For 70 years, this photograph was one of the most famous images from the attack. But in 2011 it was revealed that the subject was in fact a fire drill.*

final circuit and noted carefully which ships had been hit. Two hours later, the commander landed on the aircraft carrier *Akagi*, where he and Admiral Nagumo discussed whether another attack wave should be sent but decided against it.

American losses were significant. 2,403 people were dead and 21 warships sunk or rendered unusable. The Japanese had lost just 29 aircraft and 64 men.

The day after the attack, US President Roosevelt spoke to Congress in Washington:

"Yesterday, 7th December, 1941 – a date which will live in infamy..." he began his speech and asked Congress to acknowledge that the US was at war with Japan. It was a formality because the Japanese ambassador had already handed over a declaration of war the day before, and on 11th December, Germany and Italy followed. The United States had been drawn into World War II.



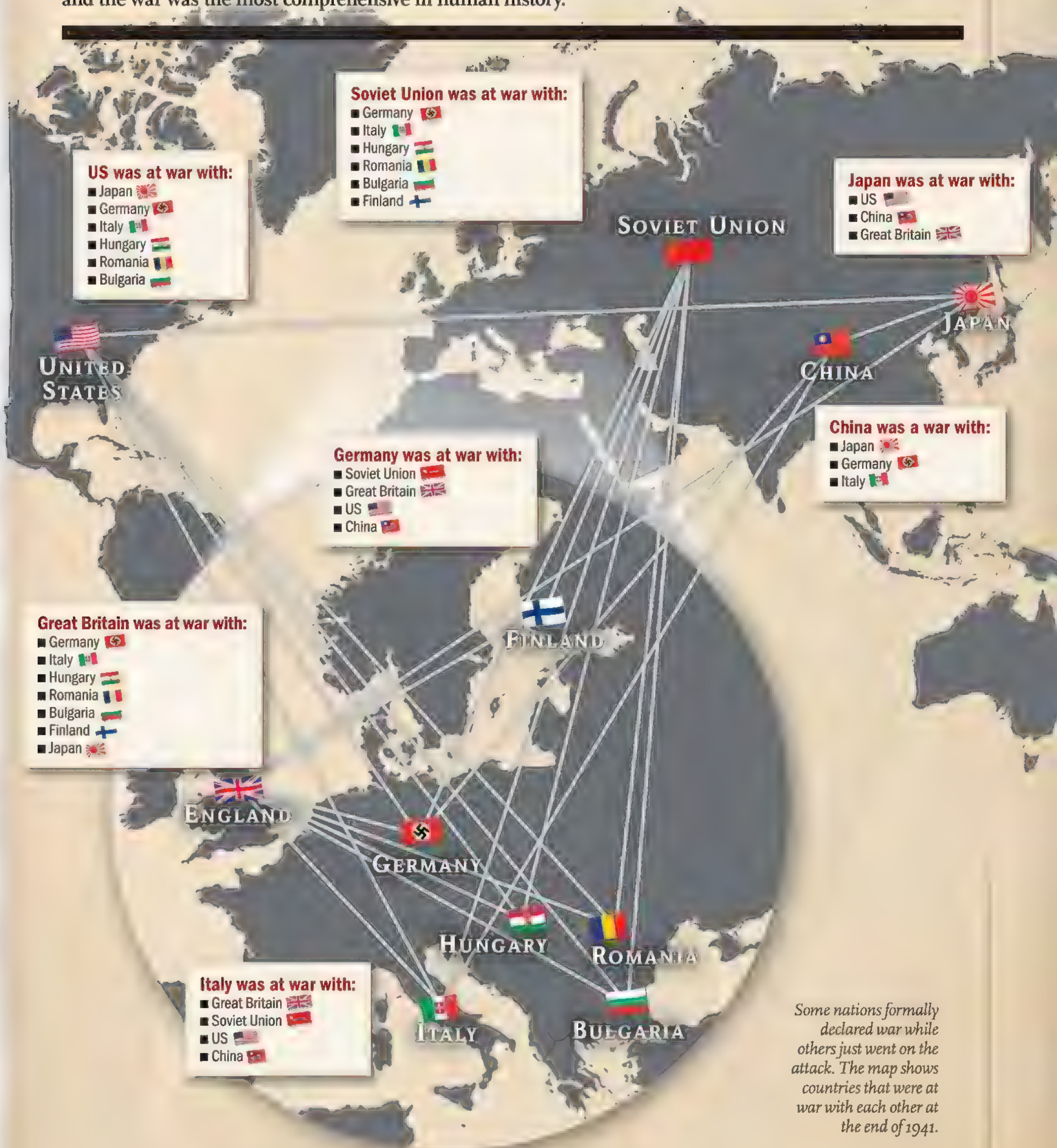
*American marines lay wreaths on their dead comrades' graves in 1942.*





# The whole world was at war

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 drew the United States into the World War. Two major blocs now faced each other. The conflict had extended to almost every part of the world, and the war was the most comprehensive in human history.







• BATTLE OF BATAAN •

# JAPAN CLEARS PENINSULA OF ALLIED FORCES

American-Philippine troops stand with their backs to the ocean on the Bataan Peninsula, while Japanese shells pulverise the soldiers' defence lines. If Allied forces do not hold the Philippines, the strategically important island will fall into the hands of the empire

1942

3<sup>RD</sup> APRIL



*Japanese infantry backed by  
lightweight tanks spent three  
months defeating the Allies  
on the Bataan Peninsula.*





## THE STAGE IS SET



The Japanese have long dreamed of a Pacific empire and in 1942 attack European colonies throughout South-east Asia. Troops quickly sweep all resistance aside and take over each area one by one. But the invasion of the Philippines is drawn out, and the empire's soldiers are thrown into fierce fighting on the Bataan Peninsula.



**T**HE GROUND VIBRATED UNDER TAKUSHIRO HATTORI'S MILITARY BOOTS, as 150 guns, howitzers and mortars sent the first wave of shells over the enemy. It was 10.00 on 3rd April, 1942. Shortly after, the colonel could hear explosions as gunfire struck the Allies' defensive line at Mount Samat, creating chaos and horror among American and Philippine soldiers.

Since the Japanese invasion of the Philippines 115 days earlier, the 14th Imperial Japanese Army, led by Lieutenant General Masaharu Homma, had forced Allied forces back to Mount Samat on the Bataan Peninsula at Manila Bay. And with newly arrived reinforcements, on 3rd April Homma began an attack that would crush the enemy at Bataan and incorporate the Philippines into the Japanese empire once and for all. Expectations were sky-high.

"There is no reason why the attack on Bataan Peninsula... should not succeed", the commander noted in his military diary the night before the offensive.

When the attack began, Japanese aircraft joined the bombing. Unchallenged, the machines swooped over the



*Drawings of naval ships and aircraft adorned Japanese postcards, which soldiers sent home to their families.*

enemy releasing a burst of bombs over the already flaming landscape. American and Philippine defenders struggled with the stifling smoke and unbearable heat from burning bamboo groves.

"It [the bombing] continued for five hours and surpassed anything of the like we had ever seen... The explosions [of bombs along] with the whine of smaller strafing planes... was almost deafening. Communication lines and artillery positions were destroyed. Several acres of brush caught fire and burned fiercely", American Paul Ashton said later.

Bataan's defences were pushed to the limit and in the long run would not be able to resist the superior enemy's assault. Japan's leaders would soon be celebrating another triumph in the empire's successful campaign in South-east Asia.

## PHILIPPINES WOULD ADD TO JAPANESE EMPIRE

Four months before Lieutenant General Homma had gathered together the strength of the empire and invaded the Bataan Peninsula, Japan had started a war with the United States by attacking Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on 7th December,

# "The whine of smaller strafing

US Captain Paul Ashton on Japan's

## JAPAN ROLLS ACROSS SOUTH-EAST ASIA

## EMPIRE IN THE FAR EAST

**1941**

## 7TH-8TH DECEMBER

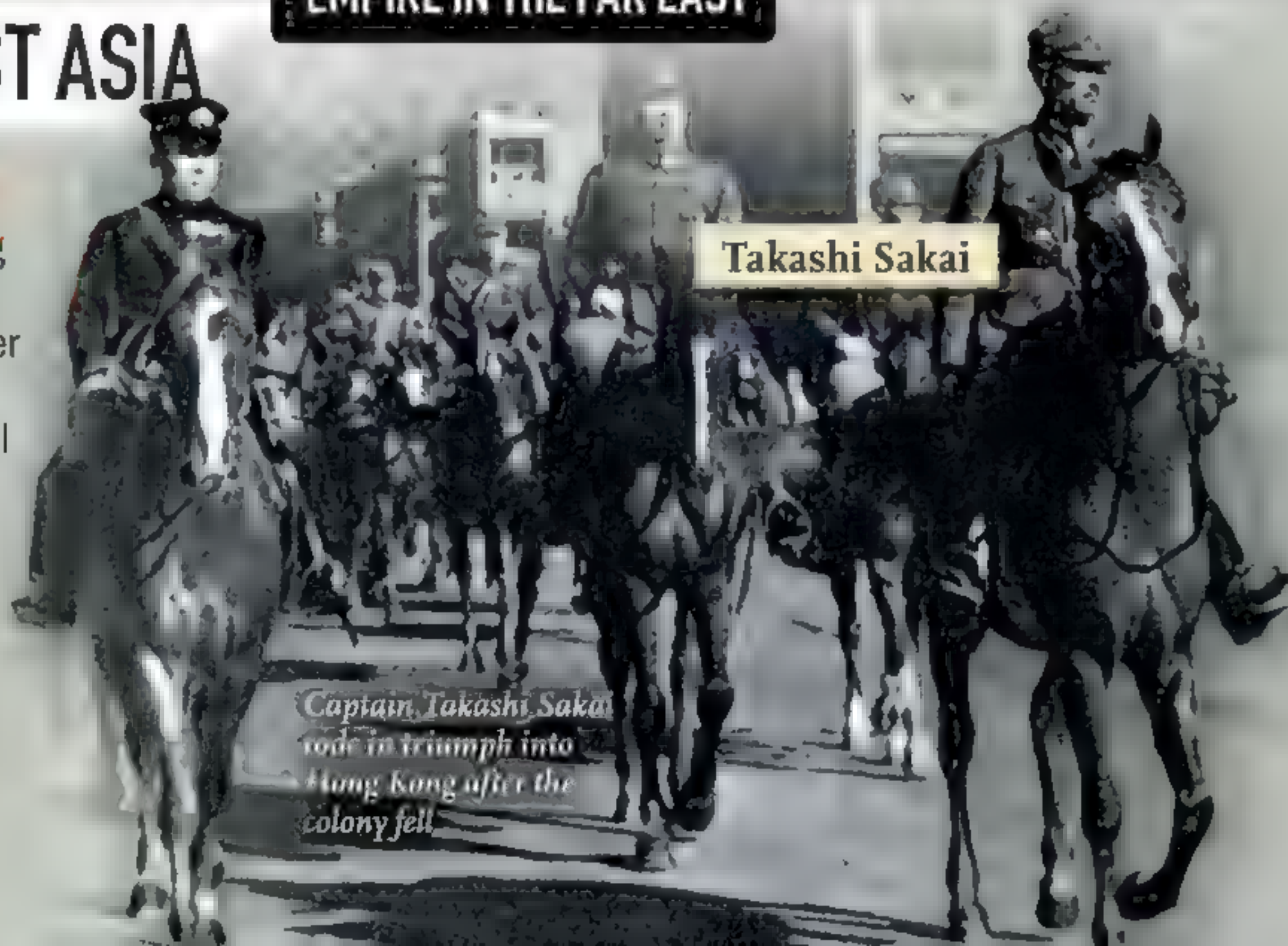
Japan launches a big attack on countries in South-east Asia. Troops land in Thailand and British Malaya, while planes bomb the Philippines, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore and the US islands of Guam and Wake.

## 10TH DECEMBER

In the Philippines, the Japanese 14th Army commanded by Masaharu Homma land on the island of Luzon. Several thousand Allied soldiers leave Manila before the city falls on 2nd January, 1942. The troops retreat to Bataan and take position.

## 25TH DECEMBER

The British in Hong Kong surrender to the Japanese, under the command of Lieutenant General Takashi Sakai. The colony is the first British possession in the Far East to fall into the hands of the empire.



Takashi Sakai

*Captain Takashi Sakai rode in triumph into Hong Kong after the colony fell.*





*Japanese aircraft supported the country's troops by bombing hostile targets during the battles in 1942.*



*Lightweight Japanese tanks were an advantage in South-east Asia's difficult terrain.*

1941. The raid on the US Pacific base was the start of a major offensive in South-east Asia. Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto pointed out to the Imperial Navy when the Japanese returned home victorious after the attack on Pearl Harbor that there was still a lot more to be done.

During the 1930s, Japan had been building up its military dramatically. Factories and shipyards delivered so many ships, planes and tanks that by the end of the decade, the empire held the world's third largest navy and the fifth largest armoury on the planet. The war material would ensure Japan's dream of becoming a superpower and, under the "Asia for Asiatics" slogan, the empire was ready to battle for the many areas of the Far East under European rule.

In reality, the country's leadership in Tokyo meant "Asia for Japan", and the planned conquests in South-east Asia were designed first and foremost to ensure Japan had access to oil and other important raw materials that were vital to the war.

The attack on Pearl Harbor had weakened the US Pacific Fleet, which could threaten Japan's operations in the Far East, and just a few hours after the raid on Hawaii, the empire was ready for its next important target. Squadrons of bombers took off from Formosa – modern-day Taiwan

# planes... was almost deafening"

attack on Allied forces at Bataan 3rd April, 1942

## 1942

### JANUARY

Japanese soldiers conquer New Britain, and the city of Rabaul becomes an important Japanese base during the Pacific War.

### 15TH FEBRUARY

The Empire's 25th Army conquers Singapore after a week of strikes. The army has been

fighting through British Malaya for a couple of months.

### 16TH-18TH FEBRUARY

The Japanese land in the southern part of Sumatra and Bali, which are both part of the Dutch East Indies.

### 28TH FEBRUARY

During the Battle of the Java Sea, the Allies suffer major losses against the

empire. The following day the Japanese land on Java, capturing it in a week.

### 29TH APRIL

The Imperial Army captures the cities of Mandalay and Lashio in Burma, which has been under Japanese attack since January.

The fall of Lashio means that the Burma road is blocked so that the US and Britain can only deliver supplies to the Nationalist army in China by air. The Allies withdraw back to India during May, and Chinese return to China.

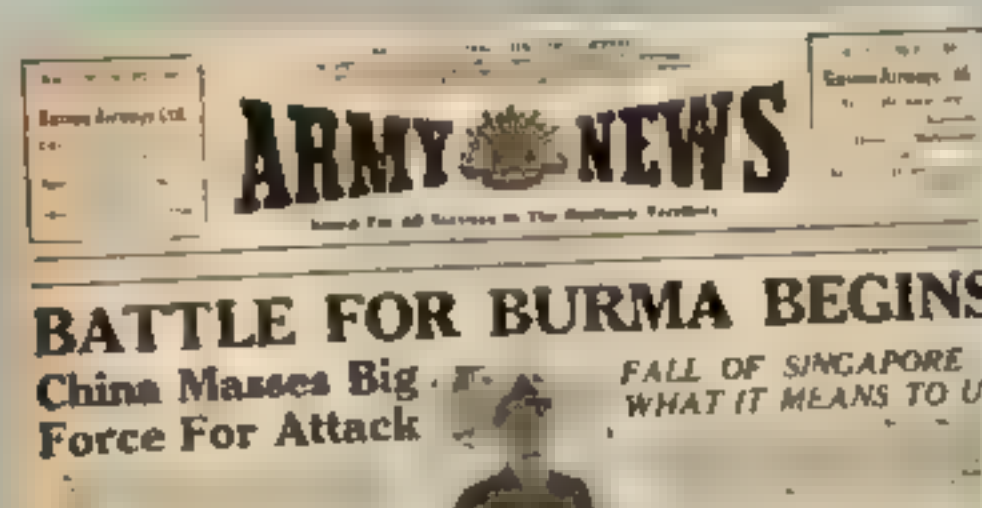


*In May 1942 the Allies in the Philippines surrendered to Japanese invasion forces.*

### 8TH-9TH MAY

The last Allied soldiers in the Philippines surrender. The fighting has gone on since December 1941. The Empire

now dominates an area from Manchuria in the north to Java in the south and from the Mariana Islands in the east to Burma in the west.



*The war in Burma created headlines in Western papers.*



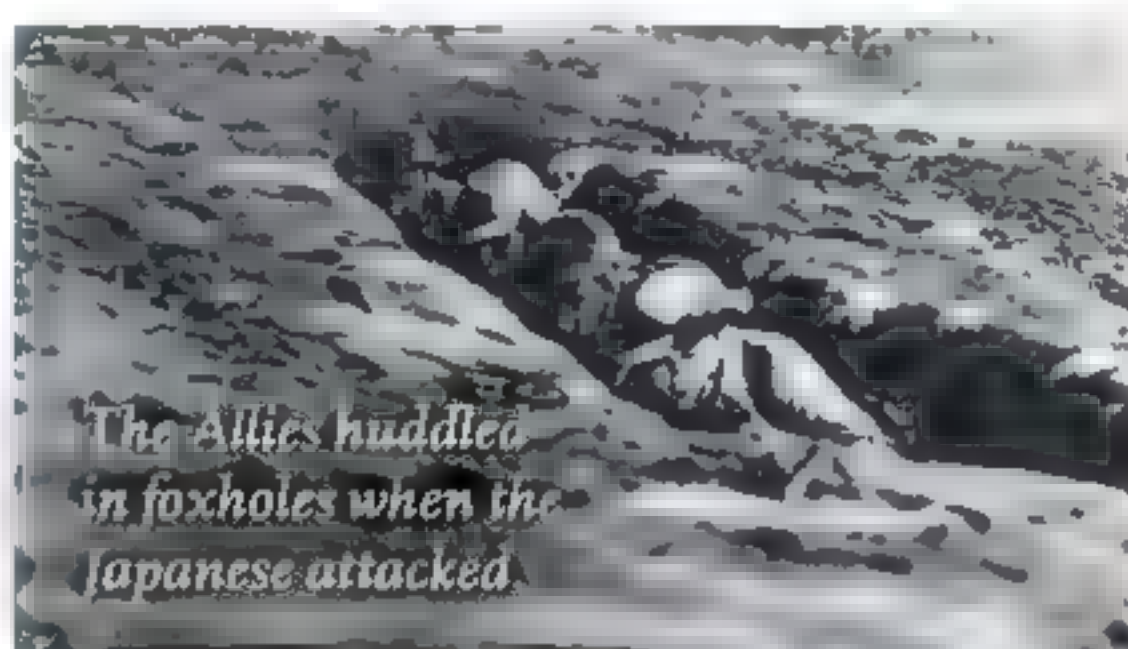
# Mountains, bunkers and batteries must keep the Japanese at bay

A rough terrain seemingly makes the Bataan Peninsula the perfect getaway for Allied troops after the escape from Manila. US generals hope that two lines of defence with bunkers, gun batteries and up to 1,200 metres of high mountains can slow the Japanese.

0 2.5 5 7.5 10 12.5 km

## 1 The Japanese initiate the Bataan offensive

**9th January, 1942:** the Japanese 14th Army attacks US and Philippine forces, who after the flight from Manila have rushed behind the Mauban-Abucay line on the Bataan Peninsula. A massive Japanese force presses the Allies back to the Orion-Bagac line.



The Allies huddled in foxholes when the Japanese attacked.

## 2 Failed landing

**22nd January, 1942:** the Japanese attempt to land 1,200 men on the west coast. But the landing fails because of waves, dangerous cliffs along the coast, and tough opposition from Allies who receive support from artillery on Corregidor.

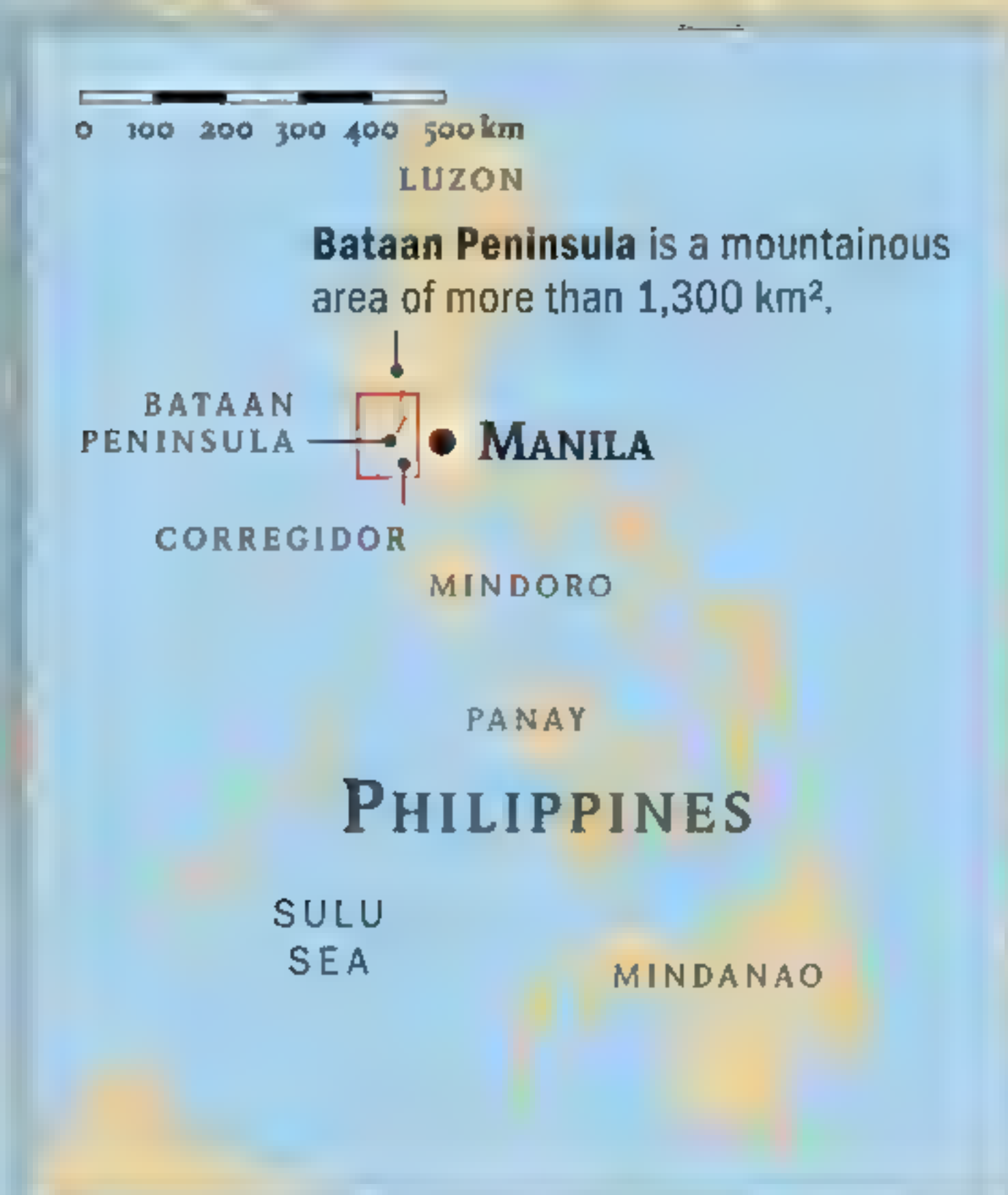
## 3 The empire makes a decisive attack

**3rd April, 1942:** 100 Japanese aircraft and 150 guns bomb the Allies on the Orion-Bagac line for five hours before the empire's infantry and tanks roll forward. Over three days, the Japanese push US and Filipino forces so far towards the tip of the Bataan Peninsula that it becomes impossible to defend.



The Japanese pelted the Allies with shells for five hours before the attack on 3rd April.





At the end of December 1941 Allied forces gave up the Philippine capital, Manila, and retreated to the Bataan Peninsula, where troops prepared for a decisive battle against the Japanese.

MANILA BAY

● ORION

### 5 Allies at Corregidor surrender

**6th May, 1942:** Allied forces at Corregidor surrender after Japanese forces have landed on the island. A few days later, the Japanese also conquer the island of Mindanao and make the Philippines a part of the empire in South-east Asia.

*The US's Filipino Division had a water buffalo as an emblem.*

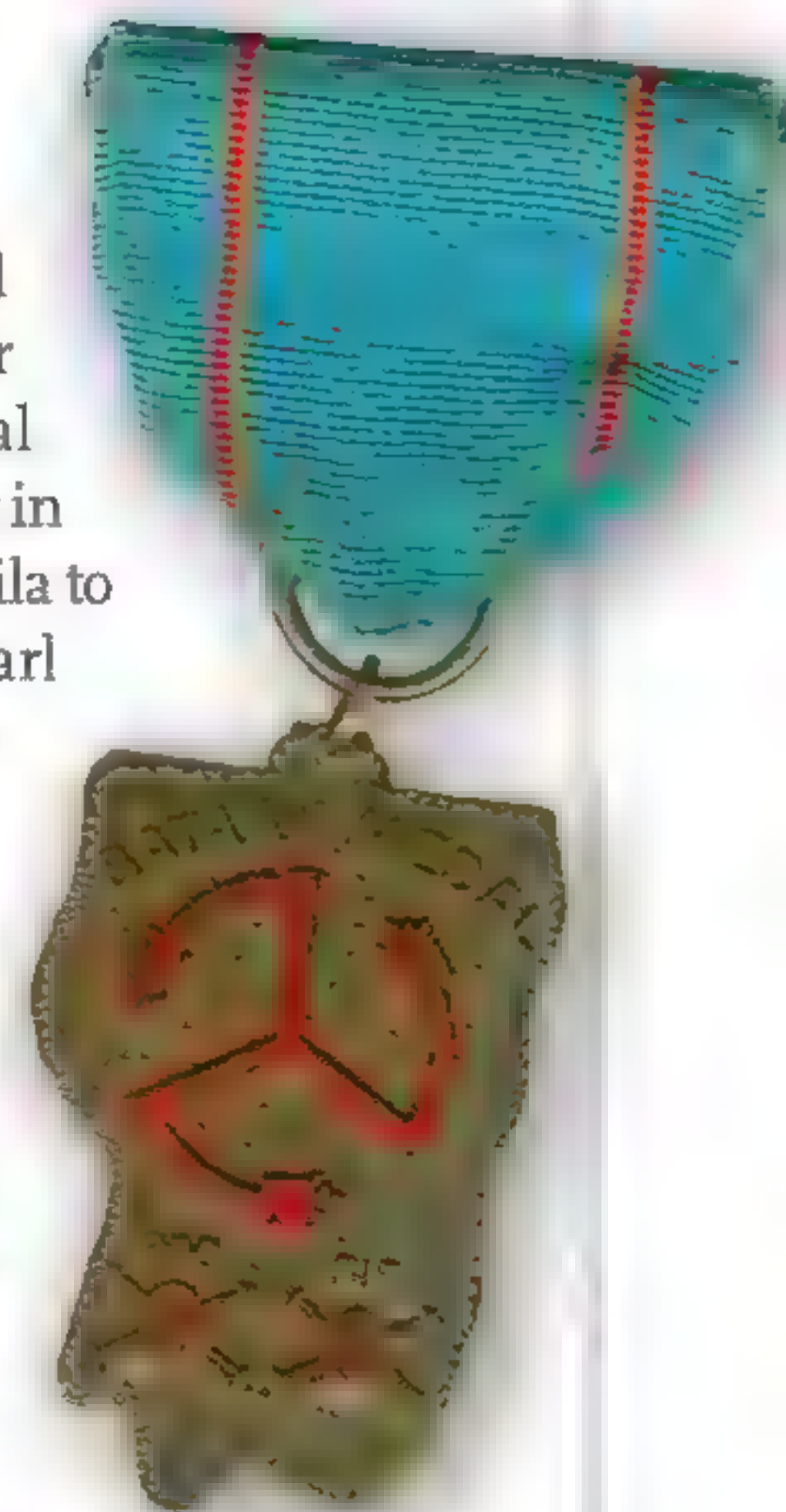


● LAMAO

### 4 Bataan falls

**9th April, 1942:** the Allied defence of Bataan is abandoned, and thousands of soldiers withdraw to Mariveles, where around 2,000 men head for Corregidor. The other troops become Japanese prisoners of war.

*Soldiers from the US coast artillery were given a medal shaped like the Bataan Peninsula.*



– and headed for the Philippines. The island was under US control and provided a base for the US Air Force in the Far East. General Douglas MacArthur woke up in the morning in a hotel suite in the Philippine capital of Manila to the announcement of the attack on Pearl Harbor. The general, however, hesitated to send planes from the airbase on Luzon Island, and US bombers were exposed when engine noise from the Imperial Japanese Air Force approached on 8th December at 12.15. Five minutes later, bombs fell over the base and desperate Americans watched as 17 B-17 bombers and 53 P-40 fighters – half of the Far East Air Force – went up in smoke.

Other Japanese planes bombed Manila, where hysterical Filipinos gathered in clusters under the acacias of the park. One US marine even reported how some even tried to use umbrellas as additional protection against the bombs.

The attack on the Philippines was underway, but 2,000 kilometres east, Japanese forces were speeding to new targets. Soon, large parts of South-east Asia would be in flames.

### JAPANESE NEEDED RUBBER AND OIL

With total dominance in the air and US troops engaged in defending the Philippines, the Japanese were able to continue racing across South-east Asia. Imperial planes bombed Hong Kong, Singapore and the American Pacific islands of Guam and Wake on 8th December. As bombs fell, the Imperial Navy headed to the east coast of Thailand and British Malaya.

The Thais surrendered quickly to the invasion forces and allied with Japan, but the British were keen to defend Malaya, which was rich in tin mines and rubber plantations. The country's raw materials had seen high commissioner Colonel Shenton Thomas describe it as "the dollar arsenal". The British gave the generals a clear message when the enemy landed near a British airbase in northern Malaya. "I suppose you'll shove the little men off!"

The high commissioner, however, did not know how professional and steely an army the British were facing. From birth, Japanese children had been trained in military discipline and trained in the duty to give everything for their country – even if the sacrifice cost them their life. Japanese soldiers were involved in military missions in Manchuria, China and French Indochina during the period 1931-1940, and before the huge offensive in 1941 the Japanese were full of confidence. They were full of pride in their heritage, their country and were not afraid.

Before landing in Malaya, the invasion troops had also received a final pep talk to ensure that blood-lust and the will to fight were at maximum levels and told to prepare as if they were off to avenge the murder of their father.

The Japanese did not lack energy and fighting

5 CORREGIDOR

Allied numbers from 9th January, 1942

ALLIES	
TROOPS:	85,000 ■ Of which only 31,000 were soldiers with adequate training.
PLANES:	70 ■ 10 planes were fighters.
WARSHIPS:	0 ■ The Allies, however, had 16 smaller vessels, such as river gunboats and minesweepers.
TANKS:	Unknown

JAPAN	
TROOPS:	50,000 ■ The number increased to 75,000 soldiers.
PLANES:	About 100 ■ The air force included bombers, which attacked the Orion-Bagac line.
WARSHIPS:	32 in the Philippines ■ Not all ships participated in the attack on Bataan.
TANKS:	Unknown



spirit in Malaya, where infantry with support from 200 tanks and more than 500 planes thundered through the elongated country, defeating the British, Australian and Indian forces. The empire advanced 1,050 kilometres through the Malayan peninsula in just 70 days and eventually occupied Singapore.

In Japan, the government celebrated by handing out two bottles of beer, half a litre of sake and a pack of red beans to each family. Children under 13 years enjoyed the sweetness of victory in the form of a packet of caramel balls, cakes and some mixed sweets.

"I solemnly declare that with the fall of Singapore the general situation of war has been decided. The ultimate victory will be ours", announced Hideo Ohira, chief of the army's press section, in mid-February 1942.

Japan made good use of its momentum and sent an invasion fleet to the Dutch East Indies, where Java's oil was an important strategic goal. To counter the threat, an allied force of Dutch, American, British and Australian cruisers and destroyers gathered in the Java Sea, but nothing could stop the imperial fleet. Japanese torpedoes tore up enemy ships like sardine cans, and in days sank 10 Allied warships sending over 2,000 sailors into the deep.

Japanese transport vessels set out for northern Java on 28th February, and just two weeks later, around 30,000 invasion troops had control over the island and its vital oil.

Throughout South-east Asia the news of defeat caused the fighting morale of the Western powers to ebb. But in one place the Allies were not yet defeated. In the Philippines, US and Philippine troops still clung on to the Bataan Peninsula.

#### DEFENDERS' STOMACHS SCREAMED WITH HUNGER

Although the Japanese had destroyed most of the US Air Force and landed in the Philippines on 22nd December, 1941, General MacArthur had refused to let go of the peninsula. Before the fall of Manila on 2nd January, the general put nearly 85,000 soldiers into lorries and colourful Philippine Pambus buses, heading towards the Peninsula.

MacArthur and Philippine president Manuel Quezón

*Wounded Allied soldiers were operated on in field hospitals in the middle of Bataan's jungle.*

*US doctors at the front could be recognised by the red cross on their helmet and carried instruments for simple operations.*



# “I suppose you’ll shove the little men off!”

High Commissioner Shenton Thomas to British troops before the Japanese invasion of Malaya


boarded a steamship, and under darkness of night crossed over to Corregidor – an island just south of Bataan – where the fortress “The Rock” lay.


From his headquarters in Corregidor’s underground tunnels, MacArthur organised a defence of Bataan’s northern Abucay line, but on 9th January, the Japanese began a massive attack. The following day, the empire’s soldiers fought their way safely across the peninsula and dropped a load of white papers, which fell like snow from the sky.

The leaflets encouraged the Allies to surrender, urging them to avoid any further bloodshed. But surrender was not an option. Washington had announced that if defence forces were able to hold Bataan for six months, the fleet would be able to regain sufficient strength to rescue troops from the Philippines. Six months, however, was a long time against a superior enemy – not least because a large part of the defence force consisted of untested and poorly armed Filipino soldiers:

“The Philippines in the 91st division wore short pants, denim blue short-sleeved shirts and poorly made tennis shoes. Their pith helmets were covered with heavily shellacked coconut palm fibres, making them a gleaming target in the sunlight”, noted a US officer who led the untrained Filipinos.

However, lack of food and supplies was the defence’s main problem. At the start of the withdrawal, rations were halved, and during the following months of retreat to the Orion-Bagac line at Mount Samat, hunger grew. “A little tin of salmon for 15 men”, a depressed lieutenant noted in his diary, and with about 225 grams of rice per day. Major Eugene Conrad from

1887-1946

**MASAHARU HOMMA**  
NAME  
TITLE | LIEUTENANT GENERAL

**Officer was perceived as soft**  
Unlike many other Imperial Japanese Army commanders, Masaharu Homma cared about the enemy and urged Japanese troops to treat the Filipinos properly.  
Homma’s lack of aggression on the battlefield and respectful treatment of the empire’s population created enemies in Imperial Headquarters, who in August 1943 forced the 54-year-old army chief to retire.

- > Was military attaché in London.
- > Was executed for war crimes.

the 31st Division marvelled at how the soldiers constantly hunted out roots, snails and snakes.

In addition to hunger, the soldiers suffered malaria and dysentery, which caused severe diarrhoea and drained energy from even the strongest of men. Hunger and disease meant that only a quarter of the defenders were able to fight in April. At the same time, Lieutenant General Homma had added 21,000 fresh Japanese troops for the decisive battle on 3rd April, 1942. Japan had already conquered large parts of South-east Asia – now

*The jet from the Japanese Type-93 flamethrower was 27 metres long.*





# "There were plenty of them [victories]... all Japanese"

An American lieutenant following the defeat to the Japanese.

the Allies' resistance in the Philippines would be completely demolished.

## HOMMA'S ARMY BROKE THE ENEMY AT BATAAN

Colonel Takushiro Hattori had welcomed Japan's massive five-hour bombing on 3rd April, and at exactly 15.00 the colonel ordered the infantry to charge across the Orion-Bagac line at Mount Samat.

Many American and Filipino soldiers had already fled from

the trenches because the fire and smoke from the bomb explosions made it impossible to stay. But even afterwards, the defending troops had trouble with the advancing Japanese troops supported by Ha-Go tanks that were easy to manoeuvre quickly through the rugged terrain. In just an hour, the Imperial Army had struck a five-kilometre-wide opening in the

defences, and when darkness fell, it swarmed with Japanese both to the west and east of Mount Samat. Grenades rained down the small mountain, and the following day the last Americans and Filipinos fled.

Hattori planted the Japanese flag on Mount Samat, and from the mountain top the colonel could see the planned attack had progressed perfectly. The Imperial forces rolled forward, and US officers realised that the defence of Bataan was impossible.

"Japanese bombers and strafers pounded mercilessly. They came in veritable clouds – wave after wave. At times, the sky was almost black", Colonel Ernest Miller noted.

Everywhere, Americans and Filipinos found themselves on the run from the enemy, but according to Miller, many of the exhausted soldiers could only march for about 10 minutes before they needed to take a break. Major Conrad also watched sadly as dishevelled and exhausted troops left machine guns because the men were too weak to carry them.

The escapees headed to Bataan's southernmost town, Mariveles, from where the soldiers hoped to get to Corregidor.

"Men were abandoning the peninsula like rats leaving a sinking ship... Bancas and leaky boats were selling to the highest bidder", a US corporal recalled later.

Nevertheless, only a few had escaped by water before the troops surrendered on 9th April. Later that day, the whole world heard the news when over the radio station Voice of Freedom an American announced: "Bataan has fallen. The Philippine-American troops on this war-ravaged and bloodstained peninsula have laid down their arms. With heads bloody but unbowed, they have yielded to the superior force and numbers of the enemy."

## JAPAN TOOK BURMA

After a month's preparations and heavy bombings, the Japanese landed at Corregidor. By March, MacArthur

had sailed away from the island, and on 6th May his successor – Lieutenant

General Jonathan Wainwright – raised the white flag.

"There is a limit to human

*The Japanese cheered after the Bataan victory, but three years later, the US recovered the peninsula.*

Major General Edward P King

*Following their surrender on 9th April, 1942, 76,000 Allied soldiers became Japanese prisoners of war.*





*An Allied soldier noted the places he'd stayed under Japanese captivity on a mess tin.*

endurance and that limit, has long since passed... I feel it is my duty to my country and to my gallant troops to end this effusion of blood and human sacrifice", said Wainwright's last message to Washington. The Allies had lost the Philippines after a nearly five-month struggle.

The Japanese experienced further success in the spring of 1942 when British and US troops were turfed out of Burma and sent on the run from enemy invasion forces. Allied

soldiers realised that the Imperial Army needed to be taken seriously. They had previously held an arrogant view of the Japanese, considering them to be bullies and third-world soldiers, but quickly changed their minds. The general opinion was that the Japanese had fought with great courage.

In just under six months, Japan's daring offensive had given the empire control over an area of more than seven million square kilometres in Asia and the Pacific.

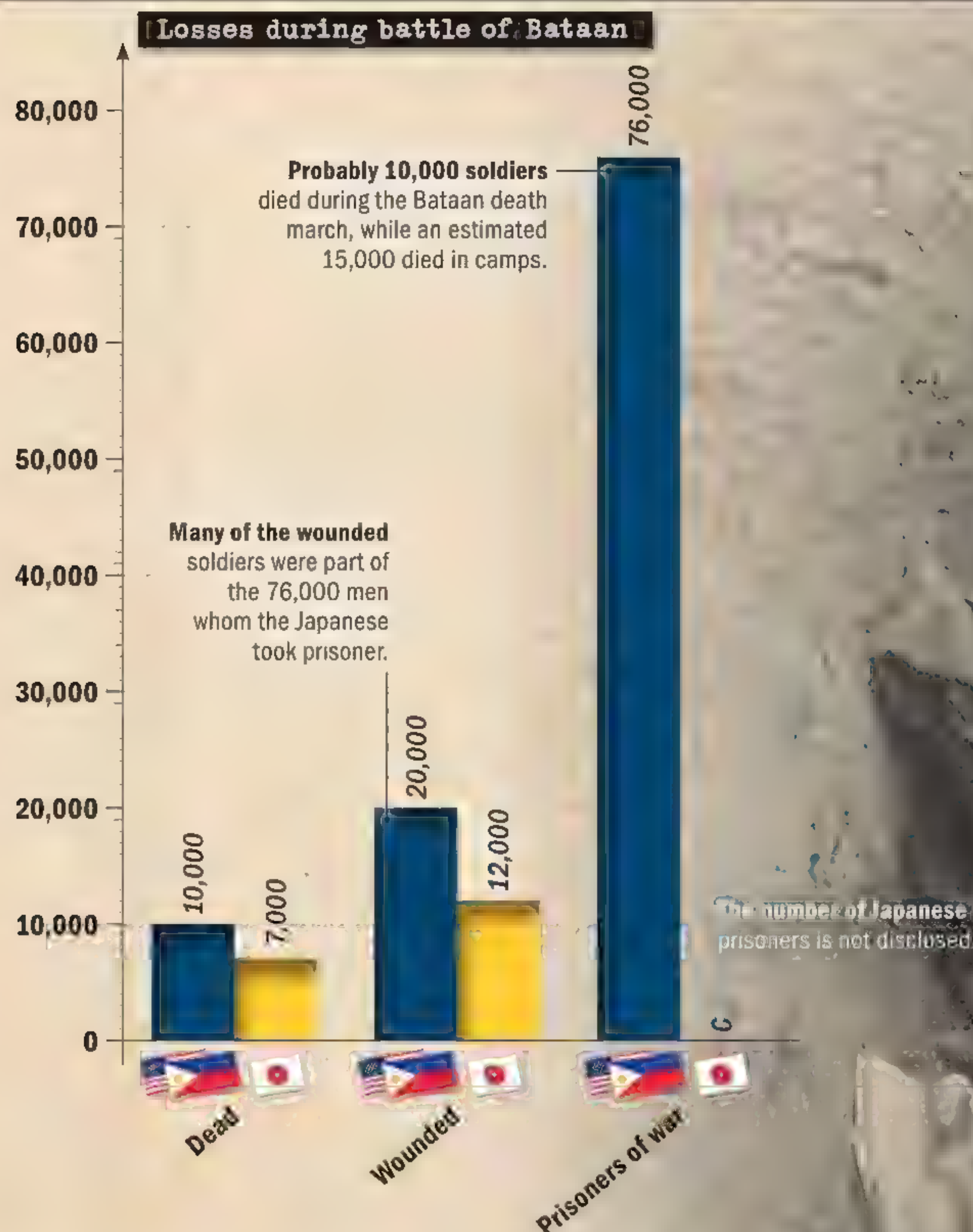
An American lieutenant like many other soldiers was offended by news reports that said the Allies would win the war. The officer's conclusion for the spring of 1942 was clear:

"We were out here where you could see these victories. There were plenty of them. They were all Japanese..."

## PERSPECTIVE

# Death march doubled death toll

The Allies suffered a loss of a total of 30,000 dead and injured soldiers during the battle of Bataan, while 76,000 were taken as prisoners of war. Captivity, however, did not mean survival – during the 100-kilometre-long march to the prison camp alone, 10,000 soldiers probably died.



*When the United States rebuilt the Philippines, more of the dead American prisoners got a proper funeral.*





BATTLE OF MIDWAY

# US SINKS JAPAN'S BIGGEST AIRCRAFT CARRIER

In June 1942, a strong Japanese force heads to the Midway islands to entice the remains of the US Pacific Fleet into an ambush. But US code-breakers have exposed the plan, and the US Navy is ready with an equal force.

# 1942

5<sup>TH</sup> JUNE

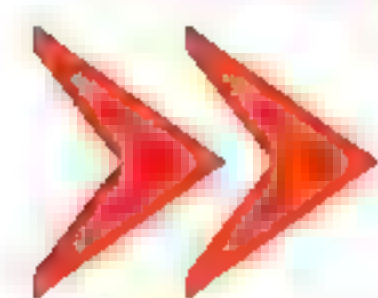




*Aircraft carrier USS Yorktown was hit hard, yet the crew tried to keep operations going on deck.*



## THE STAGE IS SET



The attack on Pearl Harbor has dealt the US Navy a hard blow, yet all its aircraft carriers escaped. Japan plans a final squeeze on the US, so the empire can continue its expansion in East Asia and the Pacific. The Japanese deploy modern aircraft carriers to strike the blow, but the fleet's commander is concerned.



**F**OG LAY LIKE A THICK BLANKET over the ocean's surface to create a ghostly scene as a huge Japanese naval force cut through the waves on 3rd June, 1942. The armada was heading towards two small atolls, which made up the US base at Midway.

Until now, Japanese forces had proved invincible, yet the atmosphere was tense among the officers on the bridge of the 260-metre-long aircraft carrier *Akagi*. The First Air Fleet's commander-in-chief, Vice Admiral Nagumo, was worried.

"Any reports on enemy carriers?" He asked.

The Japanese officers had no idea where the Americans were hiding in the fog. On the other hand, they were certain that the enemy's strength was significant.

Nagumo's mission was to occupy Midway, which as its name suggests, lies in the middle of the Pacific, halfway between Asia and North America. The atolls themselves were quite insignificant. It was true that Midway would be a useful outpost, much closer to the United States than any other Japanese base, but the actual purpose of the operation was to draw out the US Pacific fleet and inflict a final defeat.

The Japanese were sure that the Americans would not give up Midway without a fight. The US Navy would be sent into combat, and the Japanese Imperial Navy would bury the US

aircraft carriers in the depths of the ocean. Nagumo, however, feared that it would not go as painlessly as at Pearl Harbor six months earlier.

Nagumo was right that United States would do anything to defend Midway. That was why the same day the aircraft carrier *Yorktown* was on its way to the atoll, even though it was not fully operational. The Japanese had recently hit the ship with a single bomb in the Coral Sea, north-east of Australia, and the shipyards had been given just 48 hours to repair the worst of the damage. Even in such a short period, the ship's interior had been reinforced with wooden beams.

### JAPANESE STRUCK FIRST

On board Rear Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher was so exhausted from an extended period at sea involving many battles that his hands shook a little when he'd met Admiral Chester Nimitz, commander of the Pacific Fleet, in Hawaii.

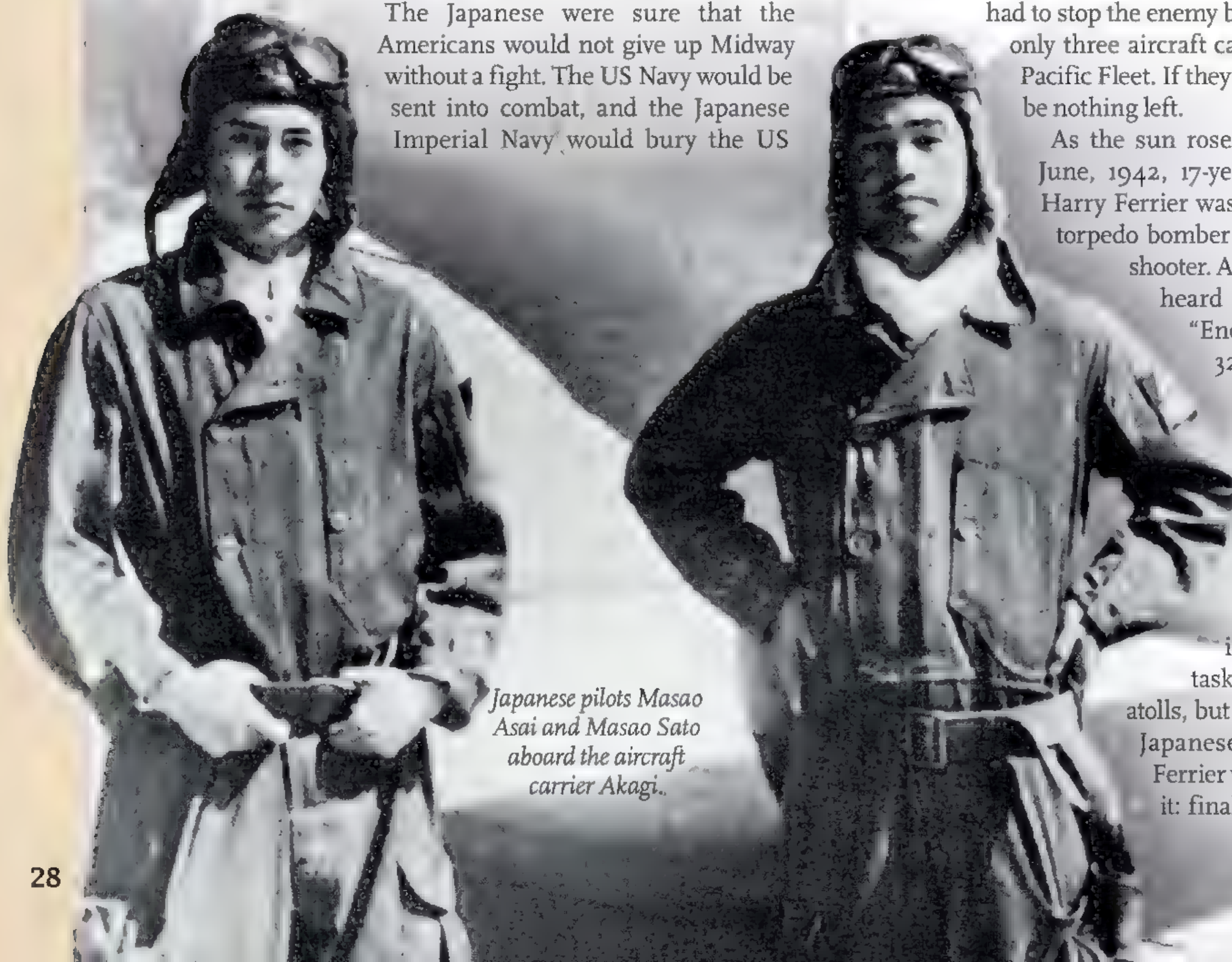
But the situation allowed no time for rest. The Americans had broken the Imperial Navy's code and intercepted announcements of an imminent attack on Midway. Fletcher

had to stop the enemy before they reached the only three aircraft carriers available to the Pacific Fleet. If they were lost, there would be nothing left.

As the sun rose over Midway on 4th June, 1942, 17-year-old radio operator Harry Ferrier was ready in his Avenger torpedo bomber with his pilot and aft shooter. At 06.00 a message was heard in his headphones: "Enemy carrier bearing 320 [degrees], distance 180 [miles]."

A wave of 108 Japanese planes was on its way towards Midway.

Six Avengers, including Ferrier's, would be deployed immediately. Their task was not to defend the atolls, but fight back against the Japanese aircraft carriers. Ferrier was looking forward to it: finally, he was in battle. It



Japanese pilots Masao Asai and Masao Sato aboard the aircraft carrier *Akagi*.



The HYPO coding station, also known as Fleet Radio Unit Pacific (FRUPAC) was housed in discreet buildings in Hawaii.



Many HYPO employees were handpicked by the chief code expert Joseph Rochefort.

## Mathematical genius revealed Japanese plans

American code expert dangled bait in front of the enemy to prove his hunch that Midway would soon be attacked. His fake message succeeded beyond expectation.

The Japanese Navy code JN-25 consisted of around 45,000 five-digit numbers, all representing a word or phrase. In spring 1942, a group of American specialists managed to crack the code, and on 8th May, HYPO's coding station in Hawaii intercepted a message concerning Japanese attack plans against a target called AF.

Joseph Rochefort, head of HYPO coding station and a mathematical genius, felt AF was Midway. Chiefs in

Washington did not share his opinion, so Rochefort dropped some bait. He got the radio station at Midway to send a false, uncoded message that Midway's fresh water system was broken. Soon, Rochefort's code-breakers deciphered a Japanese message that water was lacking on AF. The Japanese changed the code shortly before the battle at Midway, but the US Navy already knew enough.

would be the greatest experience of his life, he thought. As Ferrier's group – and 45 other American aircraft – left Midway behind them, columns of smoke began to rise from the islands. The Japanese had bombed the American base. Although Midway was well-established, the attack hit hard. Fuel depots were being burned and buildings collapsed, while only about 10 Japanese planes were lost.

The US counterattack, however, was a hopeless failure. Not one single American bomb or torpedo hit its target, and only 33 of the 51 planes from Midway returned home.

The problem was that the American bombers and torpedo bombers had no protection because the few fighter planes at Midway were devoted to the defence of the islands. Therefore, it was an easy matter for the experienced Japanese pilots in their fast-paced Zero fighters to pick off the slow US bombers.

### DEATH CAME FROM THE SKIES

A swarm of Zeros fired on the six Avengers as they approached the Japanese fleet. Ferrier saw the five other Avengers shot down as his own was hit by machine gun fire. One of the bullets struck him on the head and knocked him unconscious. When he came to, blood was streaming down his face. Behind him, one of the plane's two gunners had collapsed, dead. The pilot dropped his torpedo on a Japanese ship. He did not hit it, but he was lucky enough to escape from the Zero fighters.

Ferrier sat still in his seat. In the space of just a few minutes, 16 out of 18 members of his Avenger group had been killed.

The Japanese had won the first round, but Vice Admiral Nagumo could not relax. The US Navy had yet to show itself. Where was it? And how big was it? Nagumo had deliberately held back some of his aircraft to attack the American warships when they emerged. Some of the reserve planes were armed with torpedoes, which were most effective against ships. But a second attack wave was required to finish off Midway's defences. Nagumo made a decisive decision: the torpedoes were to be detached, and all reserve planes would instead be armed with bombs suited for land targets.

As the crew worked hard to make the switch, Nagumo received a message that completely changed his decision: one of his reconnaissance planes had spotted 10 US naval vessels – including an aircraft carrier – about a one-and-a-half-hour flight to the north-east!

The Vice Admiral was given a hellish dilemma. He'd rather attack the enemy fleet immediately, but his crew had already replaced many of the aircraft's torpedoes with bombs. At the same time, the planes from the attack on Midway were on their way back and required space on deck to land before they ran out of fuel. There was no time to switch back to torpedoes before the decks were needed for landings.



Headphones were used to listen to Japanese messages.



# Enemy's ships were hard to find

The duel at Midway introduced a new type of naval warfare, where there was no visual contact between the fleets. All attacks were made by aircraft over long distances, and pilots often struggled to locate their targets. Good reconnaissance was therefore crucial.

**6** **Admiral must acknowledge defeat**  
**17.00:** American bombers put the last Japanese aircraft carrier out of action. The battle is decided.

**1** **Japanese attack**  
**04.30:** the Japanese send an attack wave of 108 fighters and bombers towards the base at Midway.

Hiryu  
 6  
 PACIFIC

Japanese aircraft carriers  
 4

1  
 Japanese aircraft carriers  
 3

Planes were caught by a wire when they landed, but if the plane was damaged, it was difficult to complete a normal landing.



### 5 Aircraft carrier is abandoned

**12.00:** Japanese bombers hit the Yorktown aircraft carrier. At 14.30, the ship is attacked again by torpedo bombers. Yorktown is abandoned and left at 15.30.

### 4 Dive bombers hit the mark

**10.20:** dive bombers from the US aircraft carriers attack the Imperial Navy, which is heading north. Three aircraft carriers catch fire.

### 2 Midway is heavily damaged

**06.30:** Midway is bombed and the base is heavily damaged. The Americans have, however, managed to get their own planes in the air, but the two air forces do not meet each other.

### 3 Planes are shot down

**07.30:** US planes from Midway launch a series of failed attacks on Japanese aircraft carriers. The Americans suffer huge losses.



#### JAPANESE FORCES

	Number	Losses
AIRCRAFT CARRIERS	4	4
BATTLESHIPS	2	-
CRUISERS	3	1
DESTROYERS	12	-
PLANES	248	248
CREW		3,057



#### US FORCES

	Number	Losses
AIRCRAFT CARRIERS	3	1
BATTLESHIPS	-	-
CRUISERS	9	-
DESTROYERS	15	1
PLANES*	233/127	150
CREW		307

\* Planes from aircraft carriers/base on Midway



About 6,000  
Dauntless dive bombers  
were produced during  
the war.



### Aichi D3A (Val)

Type	Dive bomber
Crew	2
Top speed	389 km/h
Range	1,470 km
Armaments	3 x 7.7 mm machine guns (two forward, one aft)
Bomb load	250 kg



### Douglas SBD Dauntless

Type	Dive bomber
Crew	2
Top speed	410 km/h
Range	1,800 km
Armaments	2 x 12.7 mm machine guns (forward) 1 x 7.62 mm machine gun (aft)
Bomb load	1,020 kg



Therefore, if Nagumo attacked the US ships, he would have a limited air force, and some of the machines would have the wrong weapon load. Nagumo waited to send the reserve planes away so he could prepare a full-scale attack.

But that decision brought new problems, because the Japanese aircraft carrier's deck became cluttered with bombs and torpedoes due to the fact the weapons were being replaced under extreme pressure. In addition, fuel lines were tangled all over the deck.

On the bridge, Nagumo assessed the sky, more worried than ever. If the next US attack found him before he'd got his planes, the Japanese aircraft carriers would be sitting ducks.

### US NAVY HAD A HEAD START

Vice Admiral Nagumo had good reason to feel uneasy. The Japanese reconnaissance plane detected *Yorktown* at 08.20, but that was over two hours after the Americans had located the Japanese aircraft carrier at 06.00. The US Navy had made good use of its head start, and aircraft from Rear Admiral Fletcher's carrier had been in the air a while.

At the time when Nagumo was given the message about the American aircraft carrier, more than 100 US bombers, torpedo bombers and fighters were already heading for him. And as Nagumo received more and more messages about enemy planes approaching from different directions, something became clear to him: all those planes could not possibly have come from a single aircraft carrier!

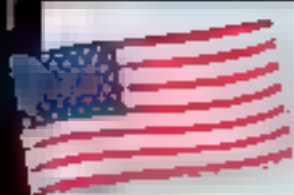
At 09.20, Nagumo had landed his planes from the first wave of attack against Midway, and new aircraft were being

prepared on the decks, primed and with the correct weapon load. It would only be a matter of minutes before the first planes could be on the wing. But Nagumo did not have minutes. Suddenly the Americans were above him. His ships were busy dodging American torpedoes, and any short breaks in fighting were being used to land Zero fighters that were running out of fuel.

On *Akagi*, Commander Mitsuo Fuchida was on deck watching more groups of American torpedo bombers approach. *Akagi* could not possibly escape so many torpedoes, he thought, but again the Zero fighters were amazing. The pilots shot torpedo bombers down at will, and every time a loud

*Nimitz was the captain of several ships and an aircraft carrier was named after him after the war.*

1885-1966



NAME

**CHESTER W NIMITZ**

TITLE

HEAD OF US PACIFIC FLEET

## Admiral rebuilt the US Navy

When Chester William Nimitz took over the responsibility for the US Pacific Fleet after the attack on Pearl Harbor it was in deep crisis. Most battleships had either been sunk or were in for repair, and the Japanese campaign seemed impossible to stop.

Yet, Nimitz managed to revitalise the fleet through his targeted but low-key leadership style – a sharp contradiction to the flamboyant style of Pacific army chief Douglas MacArthur. Nimitz was the brain behind the tactical triumph at the Battle of Midway, where four Japanese aircraft carriers were sunk. The victory broke the enemy's superiority in the air, and Nimitz could begin to think offensively.

Although Nimitz primarily fought the Japanese in the war, he knew Germany better than most. The admiral himself was of German descent and spoke the language, as he had studied in Nuremberg, Germany, in the period before World War I.

- Became admiral in 1938.
- Signed Japan's surrender as US representative.





## NAVAL VESSEL

# Enterprise was a winner

During the war *Big E*, as the *USS Enterprise* was called, took part in more battles than any other US warship – and enjoyed success everywhere.

*USS Enterprise* would leave a major legacy after the aircraft carrier was taken on by the US Navy in 1938. *Enterprise* was the seventh in the series of warships with the name, since the schooner *USS Enterprise* steamed from Baltimore in 1799.

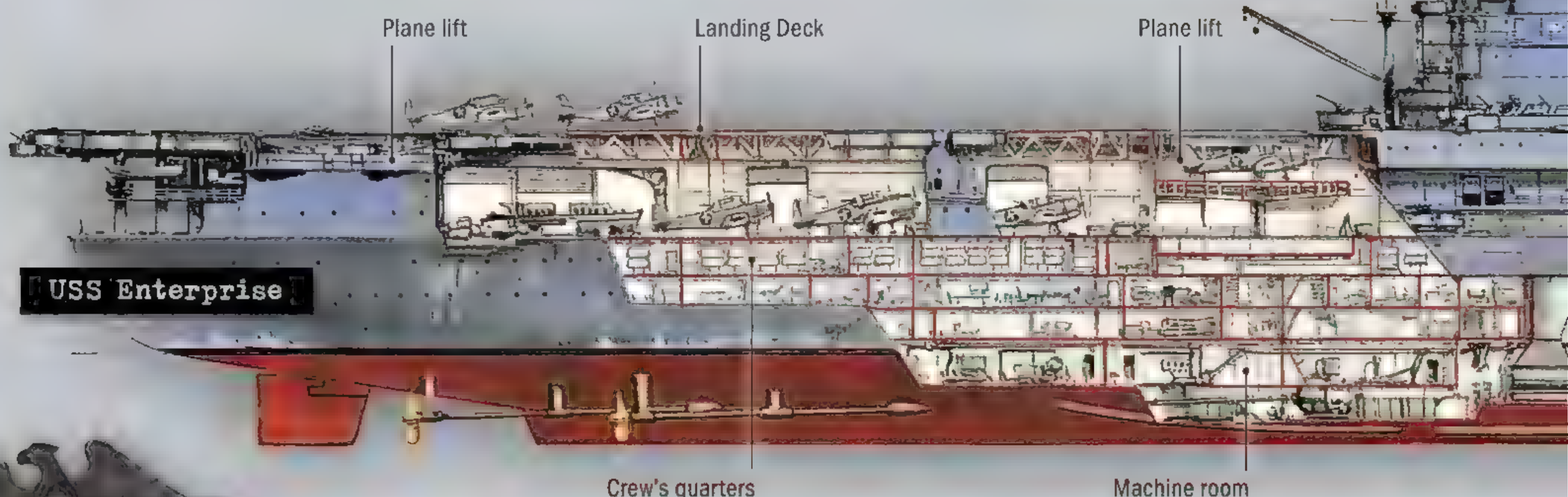
The 251-metre-long ship, however, would surpass all her predecessors. *Enterprise* participated in more battles than any other American vessel during

World War II and with 20 service stars became the fleet's most decorated ship. The British recognised *Enterprise* with the Admiralty Flag – an award that hadn't been given to a foreign warship before. *Big E* was damaged several times, including during the battle of Midway, but returned to service after speedy repairs. In 1947 the ship was retired after nine years of intensive service.

### DIMENSIONS

■ Length .....	251 metres
■ Width .....	33.4 metres
■ Top speed.....	32.5 knots
■ Crew .....	2,217 men

FACTS



*The American Navy Corps' emblem consists of eagles, globe and an anchor.*

cheer sounded from the *Akagi's* crew. Once again, the Americans planes became cannon fodder, at the Japanese's mercy without escorts.

Second Lieutenant George Gay was piloting one of the planes from the Torpedo Squadron 8 (VT-8) attacking the Japanese aircraft carriers. His experience of the attack was one long nightmare. First, there were 15

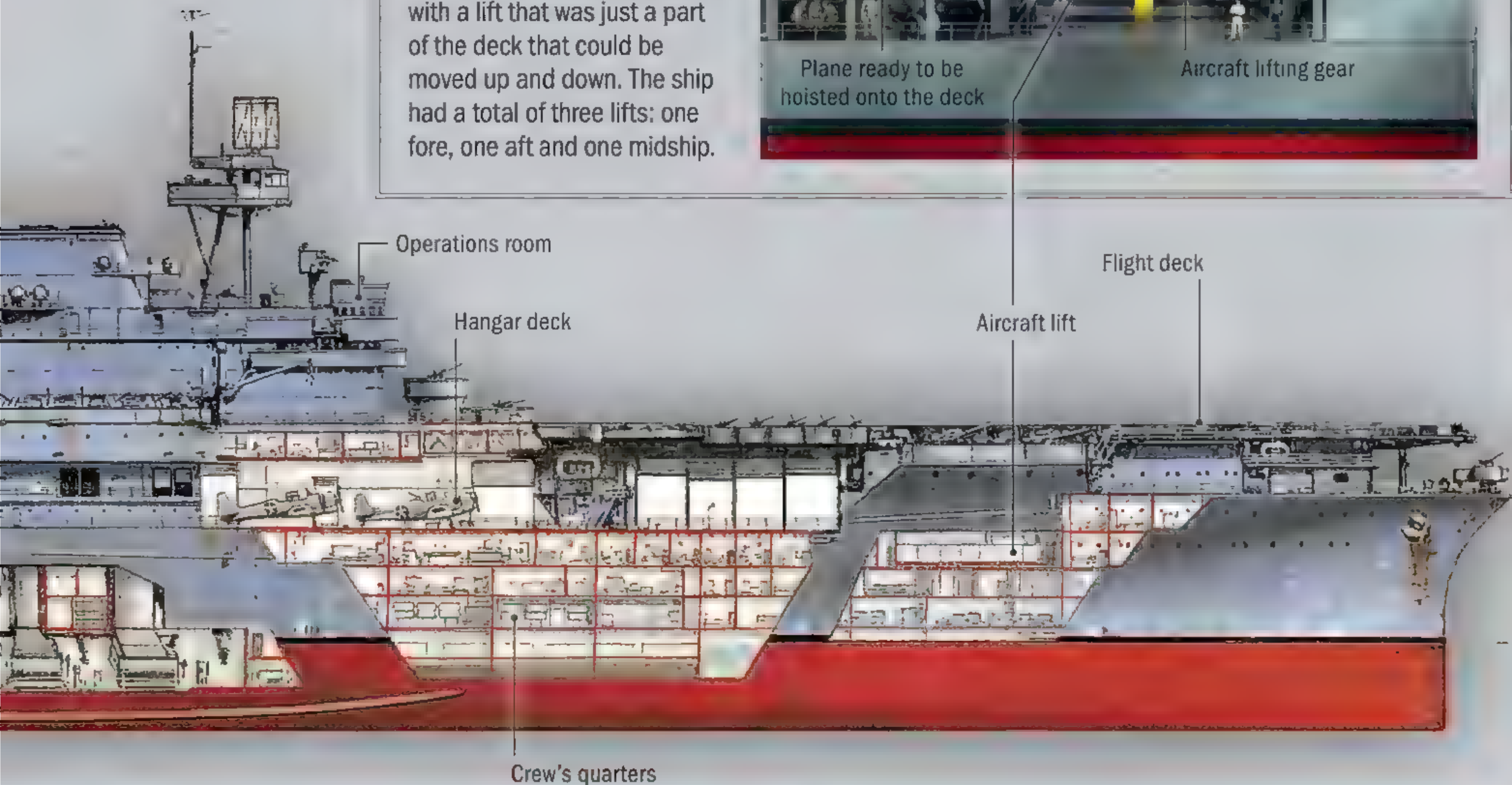
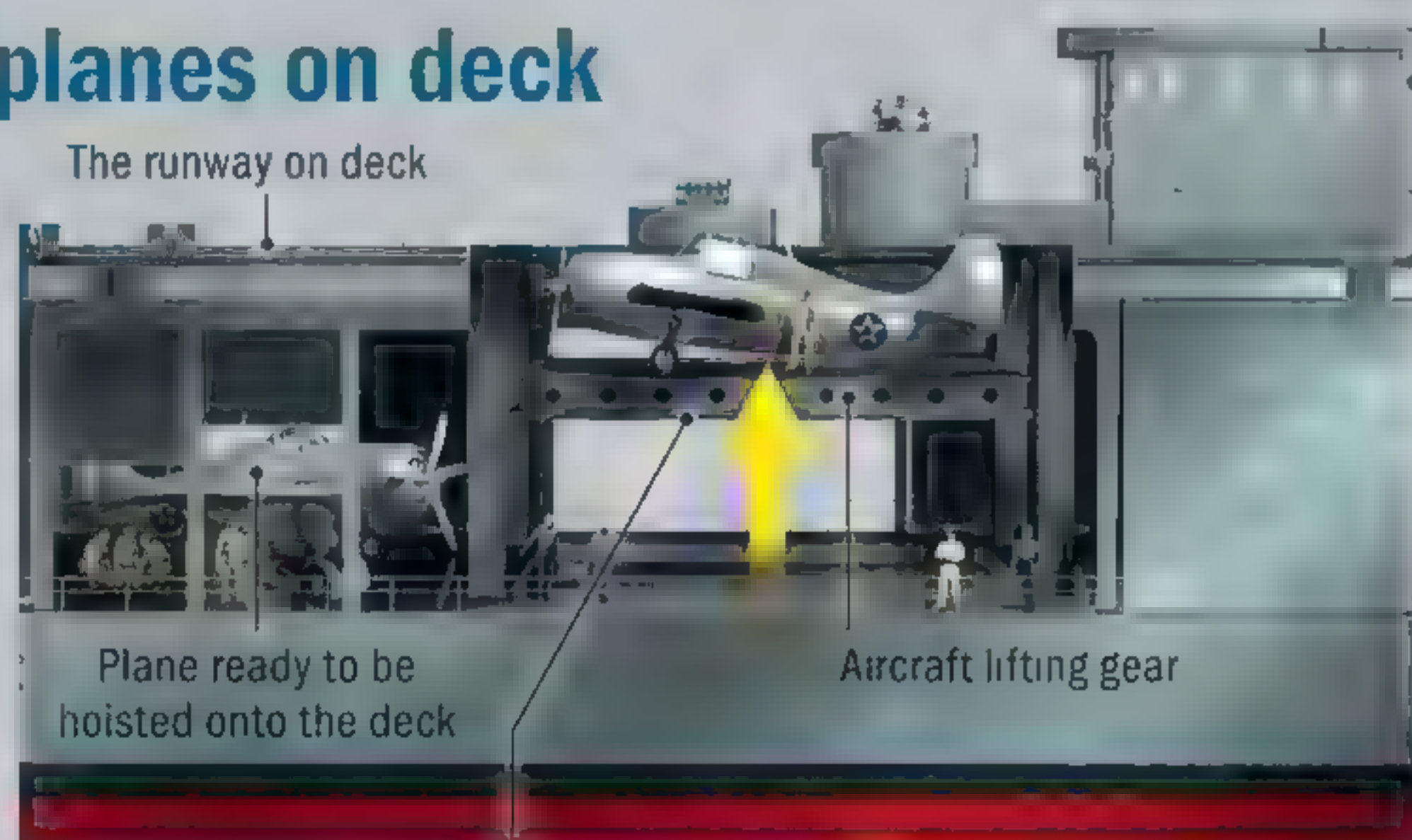
Devastator aircraft, then 14, 13, 12, 11... Finally Gay found himself all alone in the attack group. He was fighting to escape both Zero fighters and Japanese anti-aircraft fire, and when he found himself close to one of the Japanese aircraft carriers, he considered whether to crash the plane onto the deck and trigger a major explosion. It did not happen, because Gay was shot down. Bursts of machine-gun bullets and 20-millimetre shells from a pair of Zero fighters destroyed the plane's ailerons; the Devastator smashed into the water's surface. Gay escaped just before the Pacific engulfed the plane and its radio operator who was at the back of the machine.

*USS Yorktown was severely damaged and eventually abandoned by its crew.*



## Lift brought the planes on deck

During transport, many aircraft were on the hangar deck. Here they mounted bombs or torpedoes and were filled with fuel before they were lifted to the flight deck with a lift that was just a part of the deck that could be moved up and down. The ship had a total of three lifts: one fore, one aft and one midship.



Torpedo Squadron 8 had ceased to exist. And the Japanese also seemed to have won the second round. The Americans suffered a tremendous loss, while all Japanese carriers were intact and most aircraft still operational. Many US aircraft crews had sacrificed their lives, apparently to no one's benefit. But then came the battle's decisive moment, which made their efforts worthwhile.

### DIVE BOMBERS SURPRISED THE JAPANESE

A group of Dauntless dive bombers from *USS Enterprise* had trouble locating the Japanese aircraft carriers, but finally

arrived – almost simultaneously with a group of bombers from *Yorktown*. The dive bombers came from high altitude, just as the heroic attacks from the torpedo bombers had drawn the Zero fighters down to sea level and drained their ammunition. Like greedy birds of prey, the bombers swooped in at a steep angle and high speed towards three of the Japanese aircraft carriers.

On *Akagi*, Commander Fuchida saw the dark silhouettes of enemy aircraft grow bigger and bigger in the sky. He heard the terrifying howl from falling bombs, followed by more violent explosions, causing the ship to tremble.

*USS Enterprise* survived the war, but was scrapped in 1958 despite attempts to preserve the ship.





*Yorktown appeared to have been salvaged when a Japanese submarine fired the death blow.*



## Sailors fought to save aircraft carrier

The crew put out three fires aboard *Yorktown*. The aircraft carrier appeared to be rescued when a Japanese submarine surfaced.

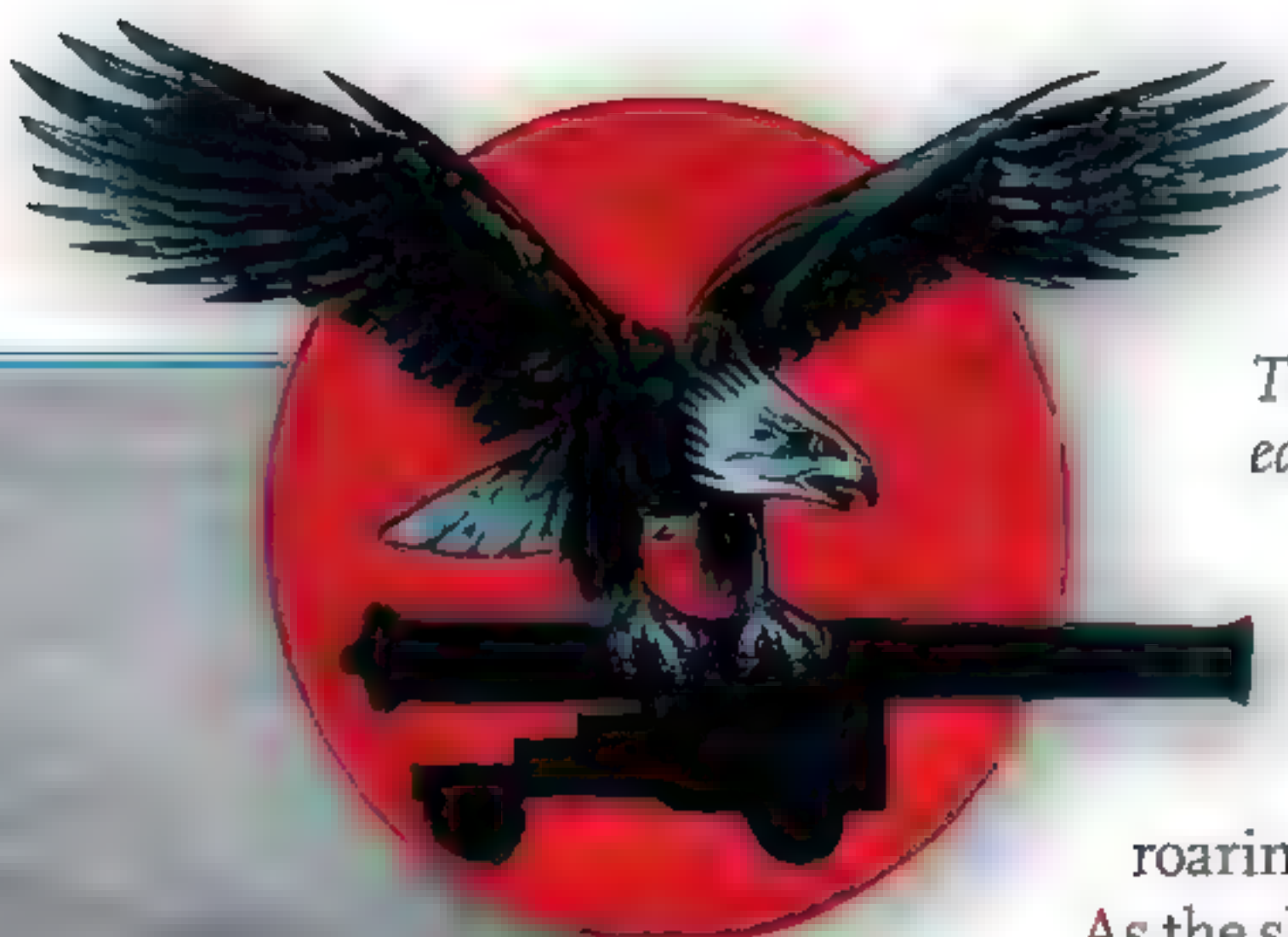
**W**hen the ship was hit by bombs and torpedoes, *Yorktown* held herself defiantly afloat. The crew had stabilised the ship and hoped to bring her back to Pearl Harbor so the aircraft carrier could be repaired.

But even though a whole group of destroyers had ringed the wounded ship, the day after the battle at Midway, Japanese submarine I-168 managed to sneak through the defence line. Two torpedoes rammed the side of *Yorktown*, which was seriously damaged. But still the ship refused to sink and remained floating until 7th June, when she finally gave up and sank to the bottom.

*Akagi* had been served a death sentence. Up on the bridge, Vice Admiral Nagumo decided to abandon his beloved flagship. The senior officers, including Fuchida, left the ship along a long rope ladder that hung alongside.

The aircraft carriers *Akagi*, *Kaga* and *Soryu* had been devastated by a series of full hits from the Dauntless planes and were in now flames. Only *Hiryu* escaped. The last aircraft carrier was well north of the others and had avoided the attention of the dive bombers.

Second Lieutenant George Gay was still alive after his torpedo bomber had crashed. He was in the warm water, hidden under a seat cushion from his plane, and watched closely as the Dauntless bombers hit their targets. A beautiful



*The USS Yorktown's emblem depicted an eagle on a cannon.*

sight, he thought. Gay experienced how the fire on the nearest aircraft carrier "looked like a blow torch, just roaring white flame".

As the ships sank and darkness fell, Gay finally dared to inflate his life raft. The next day an American seaplane landed and picked him up.

## PILOTS FLEW TO CERTAIN DEATH

The Japanese had received a crippling blow, but their indomitable fighting spirit had been obvious throughout. As Nagumo left *Akagi*, a group of "Val" dive bombers took off from the undamaged *Hiryu*. They were followed by a group of "Kate" torpedo bombers.

Rear Admiral Tamon Yamaguchi, commander of *Hiryu*, stood on deck and shook hands with each pilot and wished them well before sending them off.

The pilots knew that they would most likely die, but no one hesitated in their duty to emperor and *bokoku* – mother country. One of the pilots did not have enough fuel to reach *Hiryu* after one of his wing fuel tanks had been pierced during the morning attack on Midway. It did not stop him.

*Yorktown* became the target for the Japanese counterattack. First, several of the dive bombers hit the aircraft carrier, followed by the torpedo bombers. Even though they were greeted by murderous flak, several Japanese pilots penetrated the ship's defences and dropped their loads.

Shortly after, the aircraft carrier began to list on one side, finishing at an angle of 26 degrees. The engines had stalled and the huge vessel was left immobile and helpless. The crew was ordered to abandon ship.

Rear Admiral Fletcher had already left *Yorktown* after the initial dive-bomber attack.

"I'm too damn old for this sort of thing", muttered the 57-year-old commander as he climbed into a small boat.

## PLANE HAD NOWHERE TO LAND

Japanese reconnaissance aircraft had now revealed that the US Navy had three aircraft carriers, but only the attacks from *Hiryu* had succeeded in locating and neutralising *Yorktown*, and many planes had been lost. Rear Admiral Yamaguchi's air force was fractured, yet he still planned a new attack when dusk fell. However, it would never bear fruit.

At 17.00, about 10 hours after the first attack on Midway, *Enterprise* and *Hornet* dive bombers located the last Japanese aircraft carrier to sound its death knell. The dive bombers delivered a series of full hits, and the bombs ignited fuel and ammunition, transforming the ship into a sea of flames.

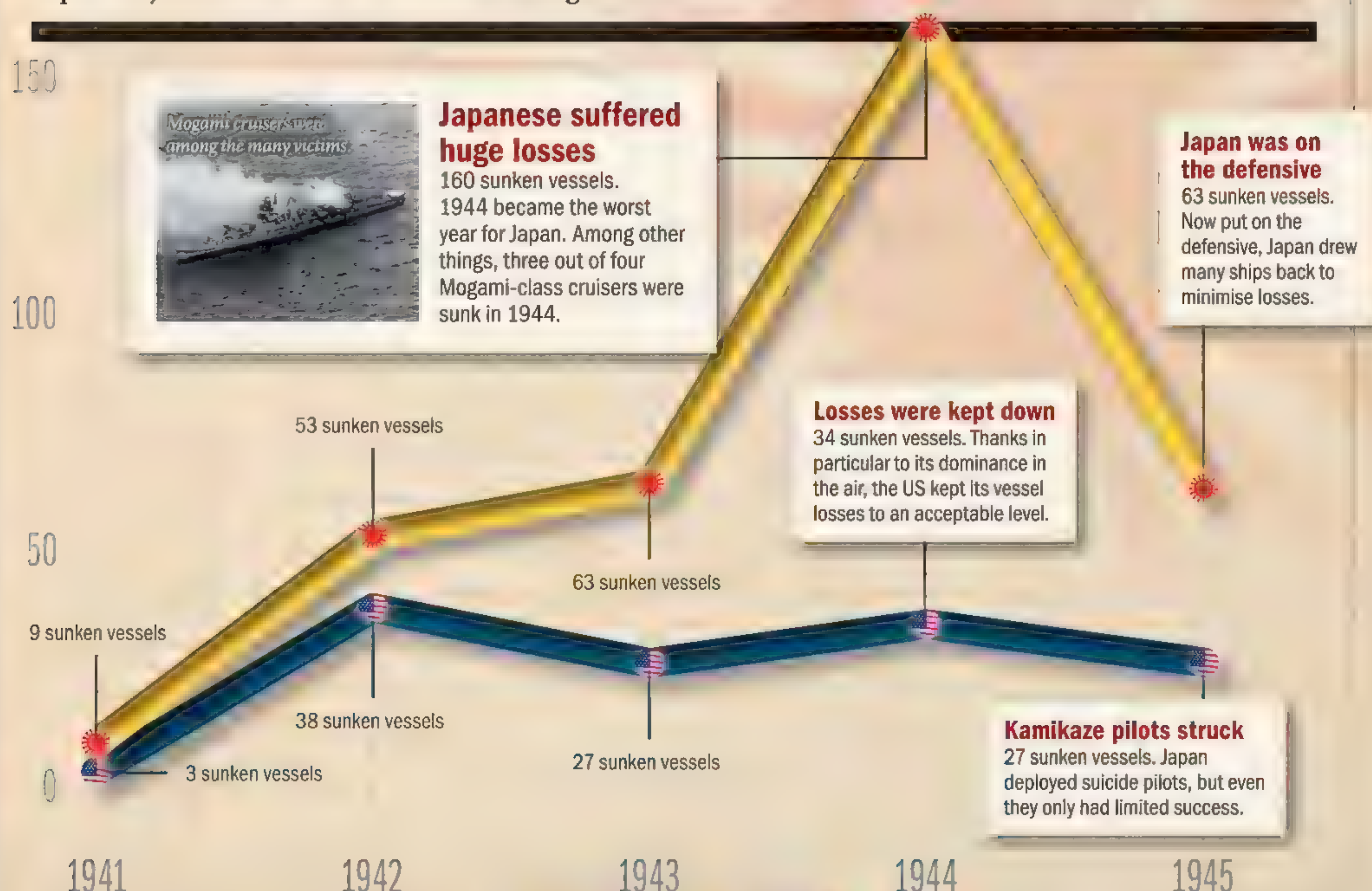
As the American aircraft disappeared over the horizon, the last Zero fighters still circled around *Hiryu*, now with nowhere to land. On board, Rear Admiral Yamaguchi decided to go down with his ship. Shortly after, the waves took *Hiryu*.

The Japanese fleet had been reduced to a collection of escort carriers without aircraft carriers to support. Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, who had boarded the cruiser *Nagara*, watched as the last plane disappeared into the ocean. He acknowledged that the battle was lost.



# Japan's navy ended up at the bottom of the Pacific


Both the US and Japan suffered major losses at sea during World War II. However, after their initial success at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese were hit the hardest – not least because the nation lost its superiority in the air after the loss of four large aircraft carriers.



SUNKEN VESSELS 1941-1945	JAPAN	USA
Battleships	11	2
Aircraft carriers	16	5
Escort aircraft carriers	5	5
Cruisers	41	10
Destroyers	145	58
Submarines	130	49

In addition to the enemy, both the United States and Japan had to fight the often-unpredictable weather in South-east Asia.



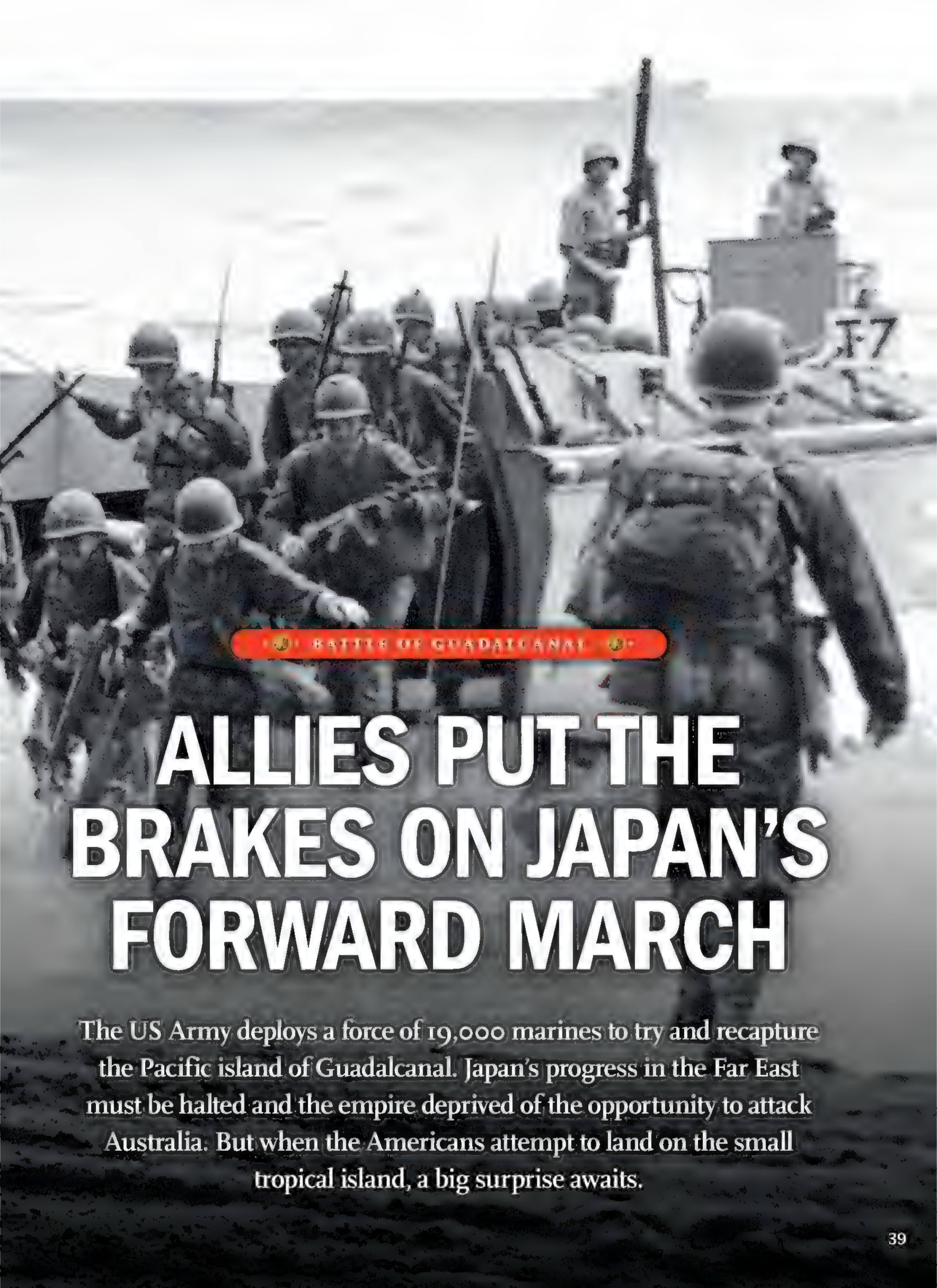


*US warships had bombarded  
the invasion beaches of  
Guadalcanal for hours before  
the marines were unleashed.*

1942

3<sup>RD</sup> JULY





THE BATTLE OF GUADALCANAL

# ALLIES PUT THE BRAKES ON JAPAN'S FORWARD MARCH

The US Army deploys a force of 19,000 marines to try and recapture the Pacific island of Guadalcanal. Japan's progress in the Far East must be halted and the empire deprived of the opportunity to attack Australia. But when the Americans attempt to land on the small tropical island, a big surprise awaits.



## Guadalcanal, 1942

## THE STAGE IS SET



Having thundered through most of East Asia on 3rd July the Japanese empire begins to establish an airbase on the island of Guadalcanal, so when the Allies arrive their goal is to reclaim Guadalcanal at all costs. The US is preparing an offensive that will soon transform the humid tropical landscape into the Island of Death.



SEVERAL HUNDRED MARINES stood along the starboard gunwale of the *USS Legion*. Recent talk about lovers and female conquests slowly faded to nothing. Only the sound of the lapping water along the side of the ship could be heard.

Through his powerful binoculars, Colonel LeRoy Hunt and his marines watched the rugged black peaks on the Pacific island of Guadalcanal, which were just visible in the early morning gloom. The men's hearts were beating rapidly, yet strangely, there was not a single shot from the enemy's coastal batteries.

At 06.14, the first shell broke the silence when a US destroyer began bombing Japan's defence positions. Soon a hail of shells was heading towards Guadalcanal. The Allies' salvo lit up the tropical beaches enabling Dauntless bombers, which had taken off from aircraft carriers further out at sea and still en route to Guadalcanal, to drop their loads. The paradise coast had been transformed into an explosive hell.

On the *Legion*, the engines were stopped and the soldiers launched four landing craft into the water with the help of creaking hoists. Dawn had broken when the first net was dropped, and marines climbed into the boats. The laborious

work lasted almost two hours, but by 08.30 the sea was filled with small black landing craft bobbing up and down, while the crew impatiently waited for the signal to head to land.

As Colonel Hunt crawled down into one of the last boats, the veteran officer noted that none of the Allied ships had been hit.

The men's eyes darted about. In front of them lay an unknown island, an unknown landscape and – above all – an unknown fate.

5,336 km<sup>2</sup>

is the size of the island of Guadalcanal, smaller than New Zealand. The island is almost entirely covered by impenetrable jungle and named after a small Spanish village.

### US WAS FORCED TO ATTACK

Guadalcanal had suddenly become a vital spot on the globe because the Japanese had planted their feet firmly in the territory in May 1942. The almost uninhabited and densely vegetated tropical island did not have much value, but its location north-east of Australia made it a place of interest. With an

airbase, the Japanese could cut off the supply lines between the US and Australia, and the empire saw a chance to deploy bombers over the Australian east coast.

Japanese ships soon began to unload engineering troops and equipment ashore, and on 3rd July, work began cutting down trees and palms.

However, an Australian spy managed to intercept information about the enterprise, and the Allies realised immediately that the Japanese's intention was to build an airbase. In Washington, President Roosevelt and his military staff met with other Allied representatives. Their decision was clear: Guadalcanal had to be taken.

The operation was given the code name "Watchtower". A successful mission might even pave the way for taking or neutralising the great Japanese base in Rabaul on the island of New Britain.

The United States still clung on to a wave of optimism after the fleet had thwarted the enemy's large-scale attack against Midway in early June. And although the Americans had not yet completed an amphibious operation during the war, everyone was ready. Major General Alexander Vandegrift was put in charge of 23 transport ships with 19,000 marines.

Just after 09.00, the first landing crafts hit the sandy bottom. The ramps were dropped, and marines stormed through the water to gain a foothold. They fired spontaneously at the Japanese batteries and bunkers. But in



*Henderson Field was only half-finished when the Americans captured the runway. Natives helped to put down sloped metal plates so the planes could land with ease.*



less than a minute it dawned on the Americans that they had not been shot at. There were no Japanese on Beach Red, as the invasion beach had been named.

### **HUMIDITY MADE IT DIFFICULT TO BREATHE**

Colonel Hunt, who landed on the beach at 09.50, was pleased with the lack of resistance. Not one of his soldiers had lost their life, and minute by minute more forces poured on to Guadalcanal. The men trailed artillery and boxes of ammunition, and soon light tanks rumbled along the shore as they sprayed up cascades of water.

Those who'd thought they were going to drill their bayonets in the enemy's skulls now skewed coconuts to get at the cool milk instead. But amid the idyll, concerns also arose. Where was the enemy?

"We stared at a wall of jungle just beyond the beach and wondered what it contained", said young lieutenant William H Whyte in his memoirs.

24-year-old Whyte soon had the opportunity to explore the rainforest when he became a part of the force that had to work through the dense vegetation to launch an assault on the airbase 10 kilometres away. With machetes, the soldiers moved forward, constantly on their guard. The leaves from the tall trees covered the light, and at ground level the air was so humid that Whyte and his companions had difficulty breathing. The sounds from the jungle were unknown, and the soldiers were terrified of poisonous snakes, which they knew slithered around the scrub. The high-pitched canyon trees reduced visibility to almost zero, and the lack of any map meant only the compass could direct the Americans towards their target. They constantly came across unexpected steep slopes that delayed their advance. It wasn't until the following morning that the troops

reached the airfield. No Japanese had attacked the marines, and the facility appeared abandoned. The barracks lay empty, but the stores abounded with bags of rice, canned salmon and – not least – beer and sake. Most of all, Whyte was amazed by the huge amount of pornography that the Japanese apparently enjoyed.

24 hours had elapsed, and the invasion of Guadalcanal had exceeded all expectations. Only one soldier was seriously injured – because he sliced himself with his machete in trying to open a coconut. The men slapped each other on their shoulders. Nobody could have foreseen that their stay on the island would develop into six months of gruelling fighting.

### **NAVAL SHIPS EXPLODED IN THE NIGHT**

The reason why the Japanese initially chose to stay out of sight was because of their modest numbers. Only 500 combat troops had uneasily watched the Allies approaching on the morning of 7th August. The bombardment and sight of hundreds of landing craft prompted the soldiers, engineers and workers to migrate deep into the jungle.

However, the Imperial Japanese Navy had in no way abandoned Guadalcanal. From Rabaul, Japan's main base in the Western Pacific, Vice Admiral Gunichi Mikawa sailed with a squadron of heavy cruisers to attack the ships moored off Guadalcanal, where the many Allied ships remained. The

US's three aircraft carriers had left the area leaving the ships in the bay without air support.

On the night of 9th August,  
Lieutenant William Whyte



*The Japanese covered their helmets with bamboo to blend into the tropical jungle.*



*Japanese troops man a machine gun. The picture was found on a soldier who was captured by marines.*



# Japanese were driven out

Once the Americans had captured Henderson Field, they had **air supremacy** on Guadalcanal, and the struggle became impossible for the Japanese.

## 7 The Japanese give up the island

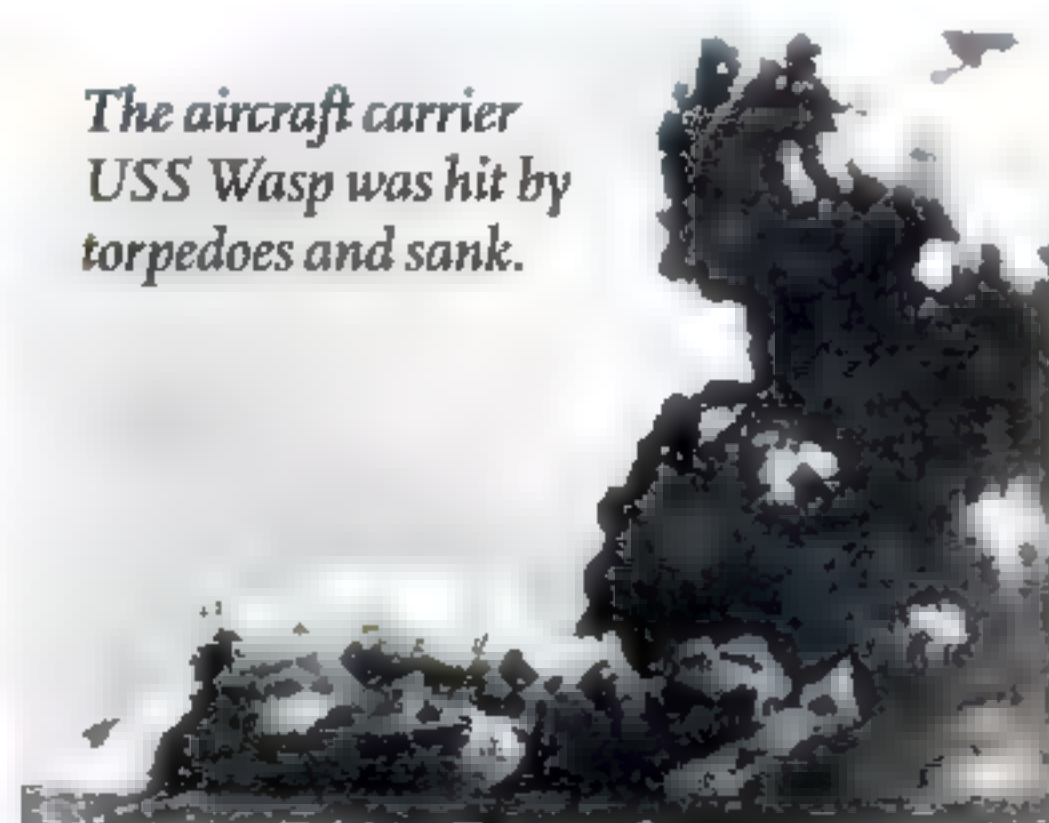
**31st December, 1942:** the Japanese decide to evacuate Guadalcanal. Evacuation takes place during February 1943 from the island's northernmost point.

0 1 2 3 4 km

## 6 US Navy is in position

**12th-15th November, 1942:** Japan makes a last attempt to expel the Allies from the island. The Imperial fleet engages Allied ships in two major battles, but without forcing a victory. Nor do the Japanese succeed in landing supplies or troops in larger numbers.

*The aircraft carrier USS Wasp was hit by torpedoes and sank.*



IRON  
BOTTOM  
SOUND

## 5 Onslaught averted

**12th September, 1942:** in an offensive at Bloody Ridge, the Japanese try to take the airbase for a second time. A third attempt is made in October with attacks from south and west, but US defences remain impenetrable.

HONIARA •

*US forces could mow the Japanese down when the enemy attacked in desperate and often uncoordinated offensives.*







### Unknown jungle island played a key role in the war

Not many had heard of Guadalcanal before the war. But after the bloody battles, the island became central to American military history when the victory showed it was possible to push the Japanese back.

## 1 US reaches Beach Red

**7th August, 1942:** marines land at Beach Red. Without opposition, the soldiers penetrate the jungle and occupy Henderson Field the following day. Troops also invade the island of Tulagi north of Guadalcanal, which is taken after a day's struggle.



The soldiers went from the landing craft without knowing what was waiting on the hot and disease-ridden island.



## 2 Allied fleet forced away

**9th August, 1942:** between Savo Island and Guadalcanal, Japanese ships and planes sink four American destroyers and force the US Navy to pull away so that landing troops are isolated. 1,077 sailors lose their lives.

## 3 Airfield strengthens its defences

**12th August, 1942:** the Americans form a defence ring around the conquered airfield. On 20th August, the runway has been completed and can provide air support to the fleet, and supplies can be flown in.



The troops' supply situation improved as soon as the airfield was ready.

## 4 Strong bastions stop Japanese

**21st August, 1942:** the Japanese start the first big land offensive. By the Tenaru River – which the Americans dub Alligator Creek – the Japanese are slaughtered by US grenades and fierce machine-gun fire.







*The victory at Guadalcanal made it easier for the US Army to recruit new marines.*

and his colleagues lay in the barracks that the enemy had built when a loud roar woke everyone. The men raced towards the beach, one following the other. Silently they stood in clusters under the palms, while in light from Japanese, American and Australian ships lit up the sky in turn. Long rays connected one ship with the other, and repeatedly the shooting ended by transforming the metal giants into rolling flames.

"It was a spectacular sight – ships exploding in the rocket's red glare. We had no idea who was winning", Whyte wrote later.

The following morning, the Americans and Australians received a clear answer when the morning glare revealed a large number of bodies and much debris from Allied ships washed up on the beach. The transport ships that were still intact brought the rest of the supplies onto the island and then quickly sailed away for fear of a new Japanese attack. The sea battle had cost 1,077 Allied seamen their lives, three cruisers were sunk, and three other warships severely damaged.

### TROOPS HID IN THE JUNGLE

The operation's commander, General Vandegrift, made it his highest priority to complete the airbase's runway so that US aircraft could bring supplies to Guadalcanal. With 19,000 mouths to feed and only a limited amount of food, the general knew that it would be a race against time.

To protect the base, soldiers from four battalions began to set up a defence ring around the facility. Exhausted marines dragged machine guns and anti-tank guns to the beach, where Vandegrift presumed most attacks would come from.

As the defence ring was established, other marines built the airfield, which the Americans had dubbed Henderson Field after a Major Henderson who'd fallen at Midway. Shirtless, rows of men dug out or levelled the ground with the surviving Japanese steam rollers. Then, military engineers prefabricated interlocking metal plates so that the runway was stable.

The work was sometimes interrupted when a Japanese shell hammered down causing earth to spray everywhere. The Japanese, however, were waiting for their numbers to grow ahead of a major assault. They deployed the so-called "Tokyo Express", which made use of destroyers to land soldiers on the coast under cover of nightfall. US troops had to remain wary of Japanese snipers who used climbing spikes in their boots to hide in the trees and fire bullets at the Americans.

An even more cunning attack brewed when in the middle of August a small group of Japanese raised a white flag to let the enemy know that they were wounded and wanted to surrender. 17 marines went to retrieve them but were ambushed and slaughtered by the Japanese. The cowardly action prompted the Allies' disgust of the Japanese to flare up, and a marine wrote in his diary:

"Our attitude was that the only good Jap was a dead Jap."

### CROCODILES DEVoured JAPANESE BODIES

The Americans would not have to wait long for revenge. Tactically, it turned out that the Japanese had made a mistake

*In the impenetrable jungle, plants obscured visibility, and enemies could lurk anywhere from the undergrowth to the tree tops.*



# Jungle war's specialist requirements

The US Marines did not have much knowledge of jungle warfare. But the soldiers soon found out that mosquito repellent and gaiters were as important as guns and helmets among the bugs and insects in the dense jungle.

At Guadalcanal, US Marines used a grey-green uniform for the first time – they had previously fought in khaki.

**Braces** were crossed over the back. A backpack could be attached to the straps.

**Combat helmet** was a standard M41, called a "steel pot".

**Hand grenade** was olive green to make it difficult for the enemy to spot it and throw it back.

**Jacket** was loose. Many soldiers did not wear underwear in the heat.

**The belt** had room for cartridges, Colt revolver and Mk 2 hand grenades.

**The gun** was an older but extremely reliable calibre .03 Springfield M1903 rifle.

**The bayonet** was affixed to the gun for close combat.

**Field bottle** filled with water was indispensable in the tropics.

**Trousers** were often supplemented by gaiters to protect against scratches and bites.

**Boots** were laced and typically had double soles for durability.

**US Marine**

UNIFORMS

1st Marine Division still uses the word Guadalcanal in its emblem as the battle was the unit's first.

by not making a large ground offensive before 20th August, at which point Henderson Field was ready.

Colonel Hunt believed the base's completion raised morale by 20 percent, knowing that as soon as the first aircraft touched down on the island, the Allies would be well-equipped to defend Guadalcanal.

The following morning before dawn, the Japanese launched their first large-scale offensive. The target was Allied positions along the Tenaru River, which the Americans had dubbed Alligator Creek, even though it was crocodiles and not alligators that lurked in the water. From the rainforests, the Japanese sneaked towards the enemy under cover of darkness, opening fire with machine-

guns and mortars – both along the banks of the river and at the mouth of the beach.

As bullets and grenades flew from both sides of the river, fearless Japanese stormed into its slow-moving current, but they were hampered by the river's soft bed, and the Americans were able cut them down from their trenches. The Japanese were particularly exposed on the beach, and as dawn broke, US fighter planes were brought into battle. The pilots flew across the sands at low altitude while holding down the trigger on their machine guns. Once the last shot was fired, the white beach had been stained red with dead Japanese blood. Many of the bodies had been torn apart by

**20 metres**

was the typical distance US soldiers travelled before they discovered Japanese positions in the jungle. The Japanese were masters at hiding among nature.





*The Americans took only a few prisoners, as the Japanese soldiers usually preferred to fight to the death. Surrender and imprisonment were considered unworthy for the Japanese Army.*

shells, and fragments of bone had been fried by the devastating explosions.

"The smell, two days after the battle at Tenaru, made a lot of us lose our lunches," noted Colonel Clifton Cates, commander of Whyte's regiment that defended the American line at Tenaru.

Further upriver, Japanese bodies floated in the water, but here the crocodiles helped remove the stench. With voracious appetites they made short work of the meat and bones from the dead bodies.

For the Japanese, the offensive was disastrous, and while the attack's leader, Colonel Kiyonao Ichiki, committed suicide, other officers recognised that the Allies' forces were stronger than the Japanese had expected. Later in September, when the Japanese attack in the Battle of the Bloody Ridge south of Henderson Field failed, the case was clear: more soldiers had to be sent to the tropical island.

### FRESH TROOPS ROLLED IN

Throughout late September and into the beginning of October, the Tokyo Express was in full swing. Japanese destroyers spent the nights dropping soldiers into areas of Guadalcanal where the Allies had no foothold. The Americans only controlled a small part of the island, so there was plenty of opportunity – the problem was just that the jungle prevented the Japanese from either moving quickly or bringing in large numbers of artillery. Disease also hit the Japanese hard.

Dysentery gave the soldiers diarrhoea, and malaria gave them blood poisoning. When combined with the military defeats, soldiers christened Guadalcanal "Death Island". The arrival of fresh troops quadrupled the size of the Imperial Army, however, and nearly 20,000 soldiers were ready to recapture the Henderson Field base once and for all.

### 600+ planes

were lost by Allies during battle. The Japanese losses were even greater, around 800 aircraft. In addition, two Allied and one Japanese cargo ship were lost.

But the Allies had also spent their time wisely. With air support from Guadalcanal, the US Navy dared to send warships and, critically, transport vessels to the area once again. 1,000 tonnes of ammunition and supplies were shipped in for the hungry marines, and on the coast jeeps were kept ready to drive 3,000 barrels of fuel to Henderson Field. Landing craft also carried 147 new vehicles to the beach along with 4,000 fresh marines – including an artillery unit with 75-millimetre grenade launchers.

### NEW MASSACRE SETTLED BATTLE

Japanese commander Harukichi Hyakutake outlined his plans for how Henderson Field should be taken: a smaller force of 3,000 men would attack west of the runway and fool the Americans into believing that the main attack would come from here. But shortly after, 7,000 soldiers would swarm out of the jungle south of Henderson Field in a large-scale attack.

It was easy to draw lines on Hyakutake's map, but the reality on the tropical island was quite different. Every metre's march was strenuous, and the increasing monsoon rain made the terrain increasingly boggy. On 16th October, Lieutenant General Masao Maruyama, who was head of the jungle attack, began his onslaught. With swarms of flies and mosquitoes buzzing over their sweaty faces, the infantry chopped through metre-high scrub and fought up and down the muddy ravines. The



*Shoes with a split toe made it easier for snipers to climb trees.*



dense jungle hid soldiers from the enemy's aircraft, but exhaustion bore down on the forces. The soldiers ploughed through the narrow paths with machetes, but could not create enough room for heavy weapons and artillery, which the Japanese had to leave in the rainforest.

On 19th October, the planned date of the attack, troops were nowhere near their intended positions. The action was postponed for three days, but the first exhausted troops did not reach the attack position until 24th October – and the company was scattered throughout the dense jungle.

At the US defence line south of Henderson Field – Lunga Point – the soldiers sat in their trenches surrounded by sandbags. They had spent night after night in the muddy holes with machine guns aimed constantly at the jungle. On 24th October at 23.00, while tropical rain beat down relentlessly, a division of Japanese suddenly emerged from the bushes and onto open ground in front of the trenches that was clear and covered with long rows of barbed wire.

"Blood for the Emperor!" screamed the leading Japanese as they ran directly into the Americans' blanket of fire. They consciously threw themselves over the barbed wire, so that the iron spikes tore into their flesh. Meanwhile, their countrymen came from behind in new attacks using the bodies as a bridge to cross the barbed wire walls. But the American machine guns toppled them like dominoes. Cartridge belts ratcheted through the automatic guns, and the rifles became so red-hot they had to be cooled with wet jackets. Every machine gun fired 500 shots per minute and gave the Japanese no chance.

At the same time, mortars and grenades were thrown into the jungle, where the remaining Imperial troops were advancing. The explosions tore the limbs from many of the soldiers, yet the Japanese continued their offensive undeterred for more than a day.

Early in the morning of 26th October, General Hyakutake acknowledged that his troops were on an impossible mission. Demoralised, the surviving Japanese fled 35 kilometres back through the jungle while 3,500 of their comrades lay dead in front of US positions.

### THE IMPERIAL ARMY GAVE UP GUADALCANAL

The attack was the last major ground offensive by the Japanese. When an attempt to land further reinforcements failed during two naval battles in November 1942, the Japanese gave up in December and decided to evacuate the remaining forces. In early 1943 the last Japanese troops left.

The end of the year also marked the time for Colonel LeRoy Hunt and Lieutenant William Whyte to leave the tropical island. The marines had given the Allies a victory and sent a clear signal that Japan could be beaten. But it had been tough and when the men trudged towards the ships in their tattered uniforms, the fear could still be seen in their faces.

"We were so weak that many of us could not climb up the cargo nets... I lay with my cheek pressed against the grimy deck my heart beating rapidly... from happiness", wrote Robert Leckie, who had fought for six months on the island.

None of the soldiers would ever miss the jungle fighting. But everyone would remember the victory.

# Guadalcanal was turning point in war

With their victory on the island, the Allies were able to halt Japan's advance. But the battle shattered the soldiers' respect for the enemy.

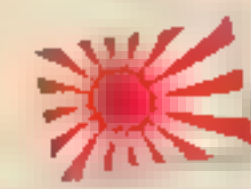
"They [the Japs] charged stupidly... enemy positions were skilfully camouflaged... enough yelling and shouting is furnished to give away the positions... their marksmanship was poor", Lieutenant William Whyte concluded after one battle. His observations were shared by many others, and optimism grew. The empire could be defeated.

**KILLED IN BATTLE** In the decisive land battles, the Japanese lost far more soldiers than Americans, especially because of the tactics of sending troops forward in head-on attacks.



**1,600**

Americans died from August 1942 to February 1943.



**15,000**

Japanese soldiers lost their lives during the same period.

**DIED IN TOTAL** Diseases, including malaria and dysentery, took many victims in the tropical climate. In addition, a number of sailors and pilots were killed in naval battles and air combat.



**7,100**

Americans died for various reasons.



**31,000**

Japanese did not return from Guadalcanal alive.



Japanese fell in their thousands on Guadalcanal beaches, where they were easy targets for machine-gun fire and diving plane attacks.





1942

18<sup>TH</sup> APRIL



*With four machine guns and  
a cannon in its nose, the P-38  
Lightning aircraft had  
overwhelming firepower.*

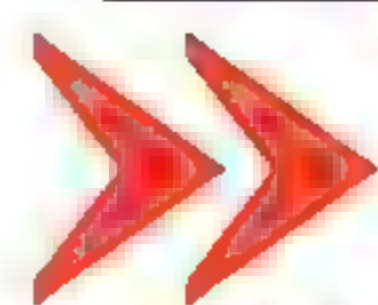
AMERICAN SNEAK ATTACK

# STRIKE TEAM MUST AVENGE PEARL HARBOR

Early in the morning, American P-38 Lightning fighters roar as they launch from Guadalcanal and head north. The pilots are searching for a Japanese aircraft carrying the man behind the attack on Pearl Harbor.



## THE STAGE IS SET



Since the bombing of the US Navy's Pacific base at Pearl Harbor, the main architect of the attack – Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto – has attained godly status in Japan. But when code-breakers intercept a radio message about the officer's itinerary, the Americans get the chance to take revenge on the emperor's favourite.



**T**HE SUN'S FIRST RAYS LIT UP THE SKIES of Rabaul on the Pacific island of New Britain when Isoroku Yamamoto put on his naval uniform. The Japanese admiral was only 160 centimetres tall, but stood like a giant in the eyes of the Japanese and was one of the emperor's absolute favourites.

Yamamoto buckled on his samurai sword and went outside. The day – 18th April, 1943 – turned out to be beautiful. A convoy of cars brought the 59-year-old admiral and his staff to the airbase, where two Mitsubishi G4M bombers were waiting. The admiral, who'd been commander-in-chief of the Combined Fleet since 1939, boarded one plane, while his chief of staff Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki took his place in the other. The planes, which the Americans called Bettys, lifted

off and were immediately accompanied by an escort of six Zero fighters. The entire strength was heading towards the island of Bougainville, 500 kilometres south-east in the Pacific. Here, Yamamoto made a flying visit to restore morale among dispirited Japanese troops who had just lost a gruelling battle against the Americans.

Yamamoto announced that he would be leaving in the morning and would be back by dusk, but for once, the admiral was wrong.

## CODE-BREAKERS REVEALED PLANS

Five days earlier on 13th April, 1943, Americans had intercepted a Japanese radio signal, which contained the itinerary for

Yamamoto's visit to Bougainville. The Japanese fleet's commander would leave his safe shelter far behind the front and the enemy knew both the time and place. With knowledge of his itinerary, the Americans had the chance for revenge against the man behind Japan's surprise attack on the US fleet at Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Successful retribution

## Isoroku

Yamamoto knew the US from the inside out. The admiral had studied at Harvard University and was later deployed as a naval attaché to Washington DC.

*Yamamoto was opposed to a war with the United States, yet loyally planned the attack on Pearl Harbor.*





against Yamamoto would not only give the Americans a sense of satisfaction after the attack on the naval base, however, but the attack would also remove one of the enemy's most effective officers and help to undermine the morale of Japanese soldiers and civilians who perceived the admiral as the symbol of the country's invincibility.

Naval command sent an attack order to Guadalcanal, where Major John Mitchell was fighting a bloody battle against the island's mosquitoes. Mitchell was a young Mississippi man who once wanted to become an army officer, but had failed the entrance exam to the West Point Military Academy. Instead, the American succeeded in becoming a pilot, and his excellent abilities saw him rise quickly through the ranks.

Mitchell was chosen to lead the air campaign against Yamamoto. This was due not only to the major's good reputation as an officer but the fact that 339th Fighter Squadron was the only air unit capable of reaching Bougainville and the Japanese naval commander. But Mitchell became sceptical when he heard the plan for the attack.

### MAJOR PUT REPUTATION ON THE LINE

According to intelligence, Yamamoto would first land on a small island on 18th April and then continue to its larger neighbour Bougainville. During a briefing at headquarters, Mitchell believed that the Americans' attack should take place during the admiral's journey. The major protested boldly:

"I didn't know one boat from another, a subchaser from a sub", Mitchell said later. "I told them that and added a second reason... Even if we sank the boat, he might survive and take to a raft or swim to shore." The major let his gaze fall over the 30 men present – in the tent known as the "Opium den" because of the fog of cigarette smoke. Almost all the others held a higher rank than Mitchell, but he was not bothered:

His words began a heated debate that carried on until an admiral interrupted. The senior officer's



## REX BARBER

NAME

TITLE | PILOT

### Flying hero survived air crash

In the late 1930s Rex Barber trained as an agricultural engineer before he joined the US Air Force. In December 1942, the 25-year-old officer was stationed on the Pacific Sea Guadalcanal, from where he participated in the revenge operation against Admiral Yamamoto.

Later, Barber served in China, where his aircraft was shot down. However, the pilot survived thanks to the care of local civilians.

- Achieved rank of colonel.
- Became head of a jet squadron.



1917-2001



## THOMAS LANPHIER

NAME

TITLE | PILOT

### Pilot became newspaper editor

Thomas Lanphier was first stationed as a pilot in Fiji in the Pacific Ocean, but later served on the island of Guadalcanal and starred in the operation to kill Japanese admiral Isoroku Yamamoto.

Lanphier trained as a journalist at Stanford University and became editor of the *Idaho Daily Statesman* and *Boise Capital News* after the war. The war veteran also served as an officer and fighter pilot in the Idaho Air National Guard.

- Was awarded the Navy Cross.
- Was buried at Arlington cemetery.



1915-1987

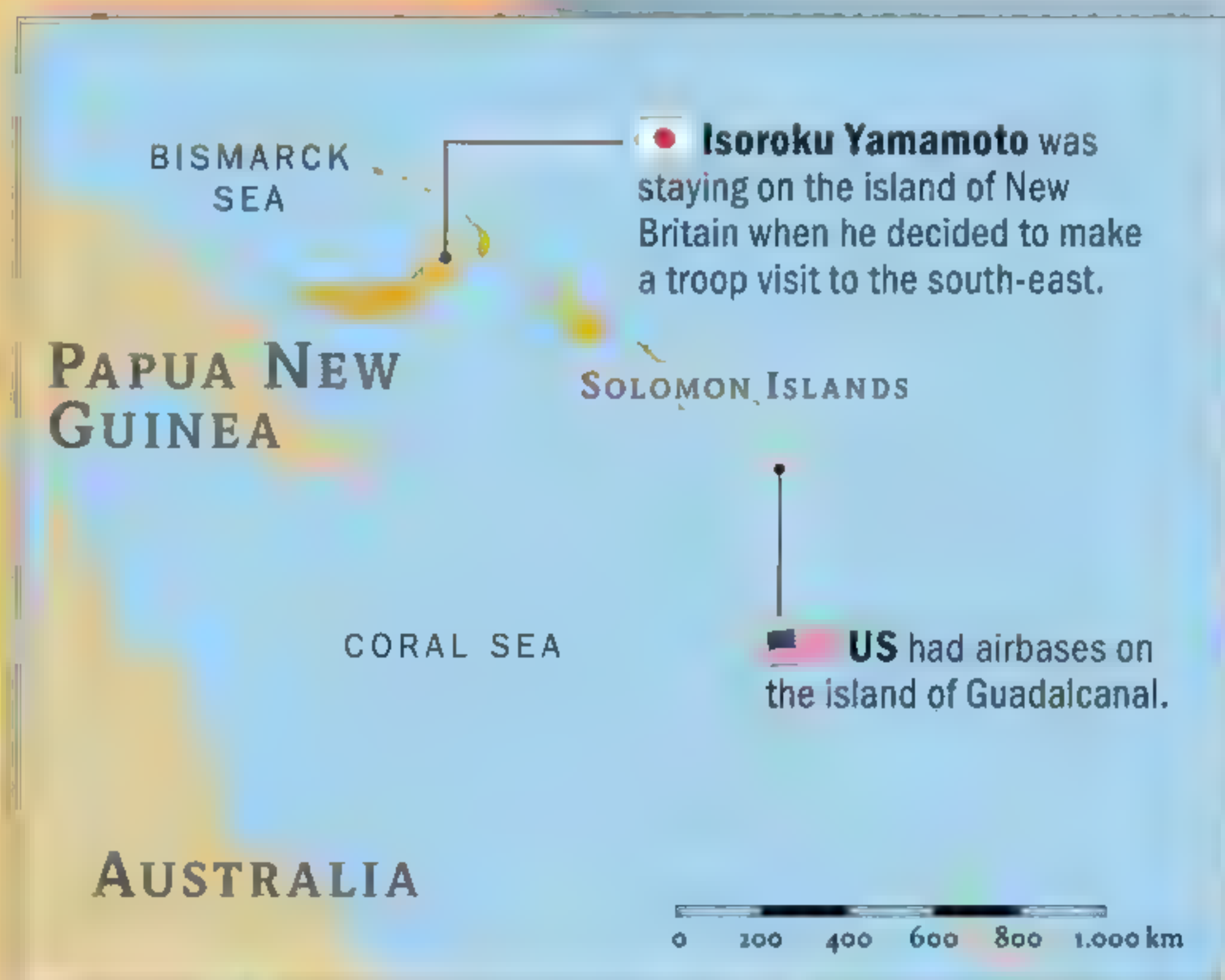


Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor cost more than 2,400 Americans lives and fuelled the US's desire for revenge.



# Few metres separate pilots from death

Much could have gone wrong during the action against Isoroku Yamamoto. The Americans flew precariously close to the sea's surface to avoid enemy radar, but with only a few metres between them and the Pacific waves, a wrong move could have ended tragically.



**6 Planes hurry home**  
**10.00:** the fighters head home immediately. The machines must exploit their high speed to escape any pursuers.

**5 The target is hit**  
**09.40:** the strike team hits the admiral's plane. The cover group is too far away and would arrive too late to battle the enemy.

## Decoded messages unleashed a race against time

When US experts deciphered a Japanese message on 14th April, 1943 with the itinerary for Admiral Yamamoto's visit to the front, Americans only had about four days to plan an airborne ambush.

Japanese-controlled islands  
 American aircraft  
 Japanese aircraft

0 50 100 150 200 250 km





## 1 Yamamoto flies to the front

**06.00:** Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto flies on a bomber escorted by six Zero fighters from Rabaul. The destination is the island of Bougainville, where the admiral will try to build up the morale of the defeated Japanese soldiers.

*The last picture of Yamamoto was taken shortly before the admiral's departure.*



**Japanese planes** head towards a small island near Bougainville.

BOUGAINVILLE

CHOISEUL

**15 fighters** head home. A plane has been lost during the air campaign.

CORAL SEA

**The initial 18** American aircraft are reduced to 16 due to accidents.

## 4 Air Force splits

**09.25:** the last leg begins when the force is divided. The four fighters from the attack team continue at low altitude, while the 12 planes in the cover group rise to 3,000 metres altitude.

## 3 Fighters fly close to sea

**07.10-09.25:** the fighters swing around Japanese-occupied islands and fly just above the waves so they would not be caught by radar.

## 2 Americans take off from Guadalcanal

**07.10:** Americans 339th Fighter Squadron takes off. The planes have to fly northwards to shoot down Yamamoto's plane which approaches from the opposite direction.

339th Fighter Squadron emblem showed a devil on the back of two eagles.



MALAITA

**Henderson Field-base** was home to 339th Fighter Squadron.

GUADALCANAL

SAN CRISTOBAL

*The P-38 was usually equipped with 625-litre auxiliary tanks, but during the campaign the capacity was increased.*



reasoning was clear: "Since Mitchell's got to do the job, let's let him do it his way".

Mitchell was adamant: "It'll have to be in the air", he replied. The major knew that he'd put his career on the line. An ambush in the air would require that the squadron – with no radar – struck at exactly the right time, finding Yamamoto's plane and shooting it down before the Japanese had an opportunity to defend themselves.

### DIFFICULTIES AROSE

On the evening of 17th April, rumours of a special mission had begun to spread at the Henderson Field airbase. Meanwhile, Mitchell was struggling against time to get an operational plan in place. His squadron was equipped with two-engine Lockheed P-38 Lightning aircraft, which had a greater range than any other

American fighter. Nevertheless, the machines were not up to the task, because Mitchell needed to lengthen the flight plan. On the route from Guadalcanal to Bougainville, pilots had to swing outside of a chain of islands that the Japanese had occupied. If Japanese lookouts on the islands discovered the American aircraft, the enemy would be able to send in a swarm of Zero fighters before the P-38s could reach Admiral Yamamoto.

To avoid attack from Japanese planes stationed on the islands, Mitchell planned a route that would lead the squadron over 800 kilometres of open sea. The plan did not leave sufficient fuel for the return, even though the P-38s carried extra tanks that could hold 625 litres. Instead, mechanics worked fervently to install special 1,173-litre tanks, which had just been delivered to Henderson Field.

Before the operation's commander went to bed, he also demanded a large ship's compass be installed in the cockpit of his own plane. The compass would help the major navigate

## FIGHTER

# Great firepower proved successful

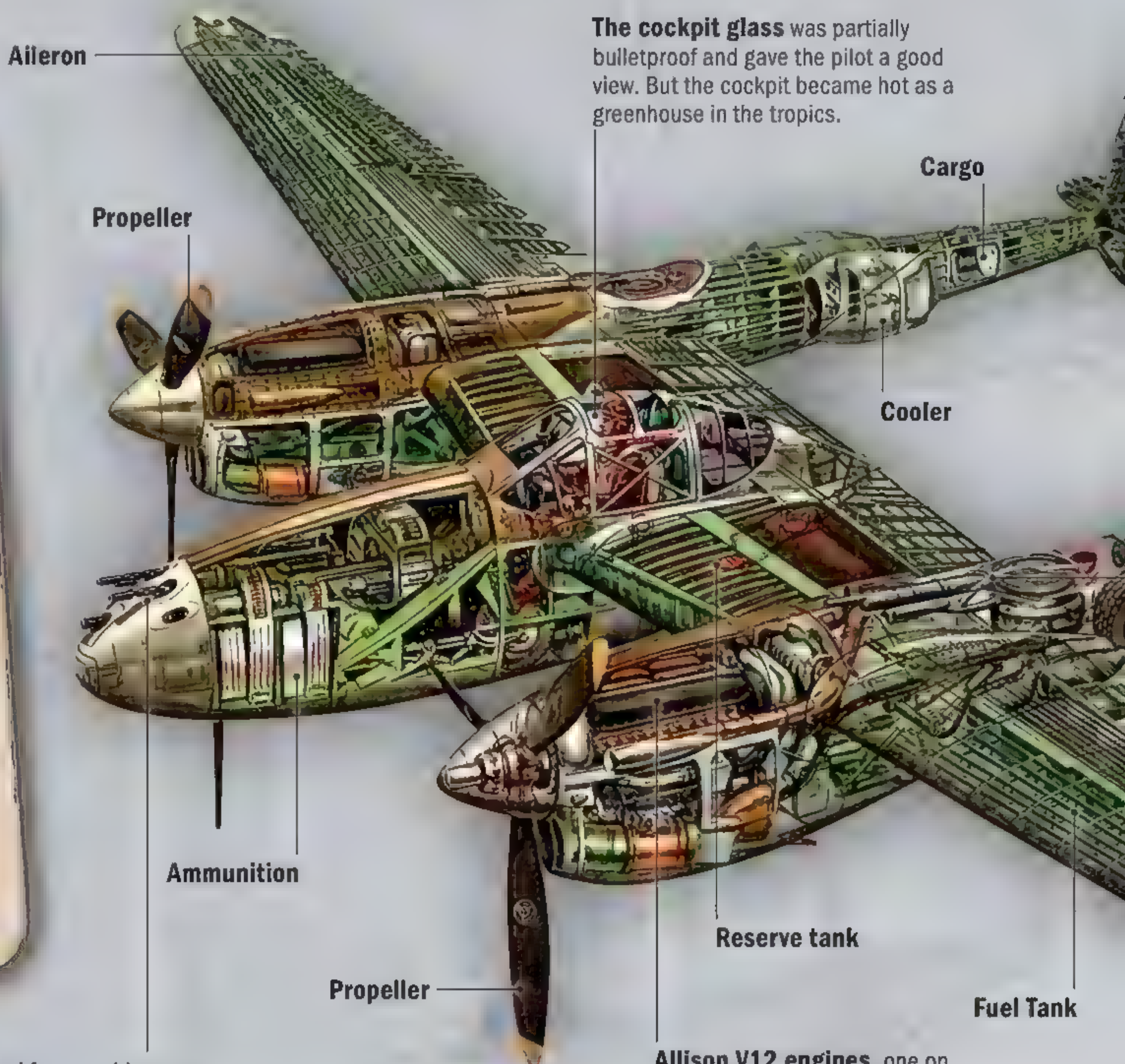
The P-38 Lightning's shooting range was greater than any other American fighter – four machine guns and a cannon in its nose allowed it to hit targets a kilometre away.



### Lockheed P-38G Lightning

Type	Fighter
Range	1,379 km
Length	11.53 metres
Wingspan	15.85 metres
Weight	7,700 kg
Top speed	644 km/h
Crew	1
Armaments	4 x 12.7 mm machine gun 1 x 20 mm cannon

The plane's nose contained four machine guns and one cannon. The fighter was able to fire a burst of shots that were accurate up to 1,000 metres.





over the open sea where he would not have visible landmarks by which to orient himself. Any inaccuracy could mean that Mitchell totally missed Yamamoto's plane.

### THE HOUR OF REVENGE HAD COME

The operation's commander woke up at 04.30 on 18th April, the day Yamamoto would die. Mitchell ate breakfast and swallowed a malaria tablet before going to a briefing in a large tent where about 100 people were gathered. The air was full of excitement as the major revealed the target of Operation Vengeance: the attack on Isoroku Yamamoto.

Mitchell listed the names of 17 selected pilots, who together with the major would comprise the strike team. The major went through the plan in detail in his drawling southern accent. On the outward

journey, the pilots must fly a few metres above sea level and not use radio so the enemy would not hear or see the fighters.

However, the squadron would still be faced by a swarm of Japanese fighters from airbases at Bougainville. To account for the threat, Mitchell and 13 other pilots would act as a protective screen for the last four pilots – the attack team – designated to go after Yamamoto's plane.

After the briefing, the pilots hurried out to their planes, and at 07.10, the 18 P-38s took off from Henderson Field. But even during the departure Mitchell's team faced problems. One fighter's tyres exploded on the runway, and a few minutes later, another aircraft was

forced to land with engine problems.

Mitchell's strength had been reduced from 18 to 16 aircraft, and both pilots had belonged to the strike team. Only Tom Lanphier and Rex Barber were left. Lanphier was a skilled pilot and a charming man who was known to attack with unusual boldness and boast without any inhibitions afterwards. His colleague Barber was more subdued, but equally deadly in a fighter plane.

The operation's commander hoped that Lanphier and Barber would be able to perform the strike, but for the sake of safety, the major strengthened the team with two planes from the cover group. After an unfortunate start from the base, the team could finally launch the mission.

### PILOTS ROASTED IN THE COCKPIT

Out at sea, Mitchell set course for the first long stretch just 10-15 metres above the crest of the waves. The rest of the aircraft followed, as the morning sun streamed into the fighters' cockpit, where there was no escape from the heat.

After 55 minutes of monotonous flight, Mitchell turned 25 degrees and began the next leg of the voyage that would take his unit around the Japanese-owned islands. Meanwhile, heat and boredom threatened to affect the concentration of even the most composed pilots. At low altitude, just a moment's lack of attention could have fatal consequences.

At 09.25, Mitchell changed course one last time and began the final 25 kilometre stretch of the journey directly towards Bougainville. As the operation's commander flipped his wings, the US pilots tested their weapons before the machines pulled together in close formation.

Mitchell felt a twinge of anxiety. The squadron was one minute ahead of schedule, but the major could still not see Bougainville, and the sky was empty. He started to fear that his calculations had been wrong. But then the green mountains of the island suddenly

*All pilots except one returned to the home base at Guadalcanal.*

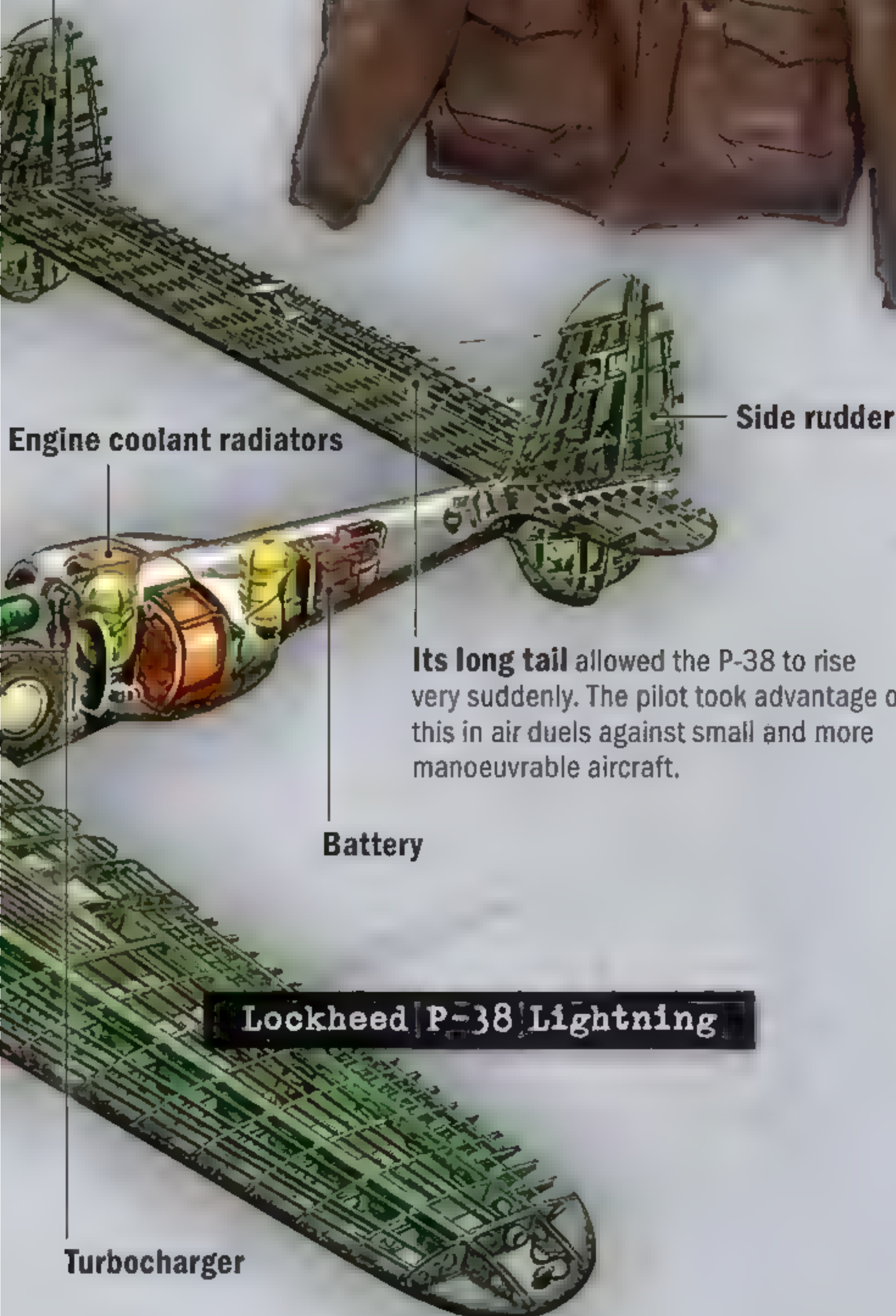
### P-38 aircraft

became the only American fighter produced between 1941 and 1945. More than 10,000 machines rolled off the assembly line.

*The pilots in the 339th Fighter Squadron wore the Air Force's typical leather jacket.*



Side rudder



Side rudder

Engine coolant radiators

**Its long tail** allowed the P-38 to rise very suddenly. The pilot took advantage of this in air duels against small and more manoeuvrable aircraft.

Battery

**Lockheed P-38 Lightning**

Turbocharger





Rex Barber's plane – Miss Virginia – was damaged during a landslide later in 1943.



appeared on the horizon, and the pilots began to rise towards the agreed 3,000 metres altitude. Here, the US aircraft would lurk until the surprise attack on Yamamoto's plane.

Suddenly, the radio sounded in Mitchell's ear to break the silence that had prevailed since the planes left Guadalcanal.

"Bogeys", it came from one of the pilots. "11 o'clock. High."

### THE STRIKE TEAM WAS UNLEASHED

The radio message made Major Mitchell look up, and the operation's commander saw a group of planes about eight kilometres away. Six small and two large silhouettes were drawn against the sky. Yamamoto's escort was smaller than expected, but on the other hand, the admiral and his staff were obviously split between the two bombers. The major had only counted on one. The Americans would have to shoot down both machines to be sure to hit their prey.

Mitchell ordered that the extra fuel tanks be jettisoned to make the American aircraft more manoeuvrable. Then he let the attackers loose.

"He's your meat Tom", Mitchell ordered Lanphier.

The operation's commander then rose with the other 11 aircraft ready to receive

### Two shots

from American aircraft hit Isoroku Yamamoto. One shot the admiral in his shoulder, while the other hit his head and killed him.

those Japanese fighters expected to fly out from the local airbases. With Lanphier at the forefront, the attack team approached quickly from below without being detected.

Normally, attacks would come from above, but here Yamamoto's escort would find it hard to see the green American aircraft against the jungle tree cover. The Americans were getting close before the Japanese Zero fighters finally threw themselves upon the enemy in a wild dive.

Instinctively, Lanphier changed course, and instead of chasing the Betty, he heeled his nose up against the Japanese fighters.

"Go for the lead bomber", shouted Mitchell into the radio as he saw the pilot's manoeuvre. "For God's sake, go for the bombers!"

But Lanphier did not respond. As his wingman, Barber should have followed him, but with faith in the mission, Barber

maintained his course against the Japanese bombers.

Barber was all alone, as a problem jettisoning the extra tank had caused the last two pilots to turn back. The operation's attack team was reduced from four planes to only one – failure was moving perilously closer.

### SINGLE PILOT FINISHED THE JOB

Lieutenant Rex Barber approached the front Betty, perpendicular to the Japanese plane's course. He hadn't got the bomber's fuselage in his sights before the swift P-38 flew over its target; instead, the American had to throw his fighter into a sharp turn.

Suddenly, Barber had the Japanese bomber in front of him, just a plane's length away. The American fired both machine guns, which shattered the Betty's tail and destroyed the right-side engine. The plane lost height quickly and Barber had to swing to one side to avoid a collision. The lieutenant did not

On 5th June, 1943, Isoroku Yamamoto received a state funeral in Tokyo.





know that he had shot down Yamamoto's plane, and that the admiral wouldn't survive the crash. Barber continued targeting the other Betty that tried to escape at low altitude over the ocean. Projectiles from aggressive Zero fighters hammered into the American P-38, but he was holding his course and hoped that the cockpit's armoured seat would protect him. In front, Barber saw another American fighter attacking the fugitive Betty. Behind the control was a member of the attack team who had finally got rid of their extra tank.

A burst of gunfire set fire to the Betty's right-side engine, and when Barber got another chance, he finished the job. The shattered Japanese plane crash-landed into the ocean waves.

### JAPANESE SILENT ABOUT YAMAMOTO'S DEATH

From high in the skies, Mitchell realised that Japanese reinforcements were close, so he used the cover group to divert Yamamoto's escort. Help came in time to rescue Barber, who watched the Japanese fighters flying away.

"Let's go home", was the commander's order over the radio.

When Barber landed several hours later on Guadalcanal, he had 104 bullet holes in his P-38 fighter. Miraculously, the plane had stayed in the air, and only one American plane was lost during Operation Vengeance.

Despite technical problems, accidents and pilot failures, the action had been a complete success. Yamamoto was dead in the jungles of Bougainville after the crash, and even though his chief of staff survived the emergency landing at sea, no one could replace the dead commander-in-chief. It wasn't until one month later on 21st May, 1943, that the leaders of the empire informed the public about Yamamoto's death. Three million Japanese attended a funeral ceremony in honour of the fallen war hero in Tokyo.

"Is he dead? Gosh!" President Franklin D Roosevelt said with surprise when the press in Washington DC asked the governor to comment on the operation shortly afterwards. Of course, Roosevelt had long been briefed on the assassination. The president joined in the ensuing laughter and the United States was a step closer to victory in the Pacific War.

### DISAGREEMENT SPLIT FLYING HEROES

Although the US reprisal was a success, the mission led to disagreement between two of the main characters. As the fighter squadron landed after Operation Vengeance, Captain Tom Lanphier was the first pilot on the ground.

"I got the son-of-a-bitch! I got Yamamoto", Lanphier yelled and celebrated with the personnel on the base.

"How in the hell do you know you got Yamamoto?" came the challenge from Lieutenant Rex Barber, who hadn't seen his colleague within range of the admiral. Nobody else could confirm Lanphier's heroism, but the triumphant captain had already taken the credit. Despite Barber's protests, Lanphier was officially recognised as a part of the shooting of Yamamoto, and the disagreement caused a permanent rift in the friendship between the two pilots.

After the war, the wreck of Yamamoto's aircraft was investigated and pilots from the admiral's escort reported upon. Everything indicated that Barber was the only one who'd attacked and downed the bomber. Yet, until his death in 1987, Lanphier held to his claim that he shot Yamamoto after Barber had only damaged the admiral's plane.

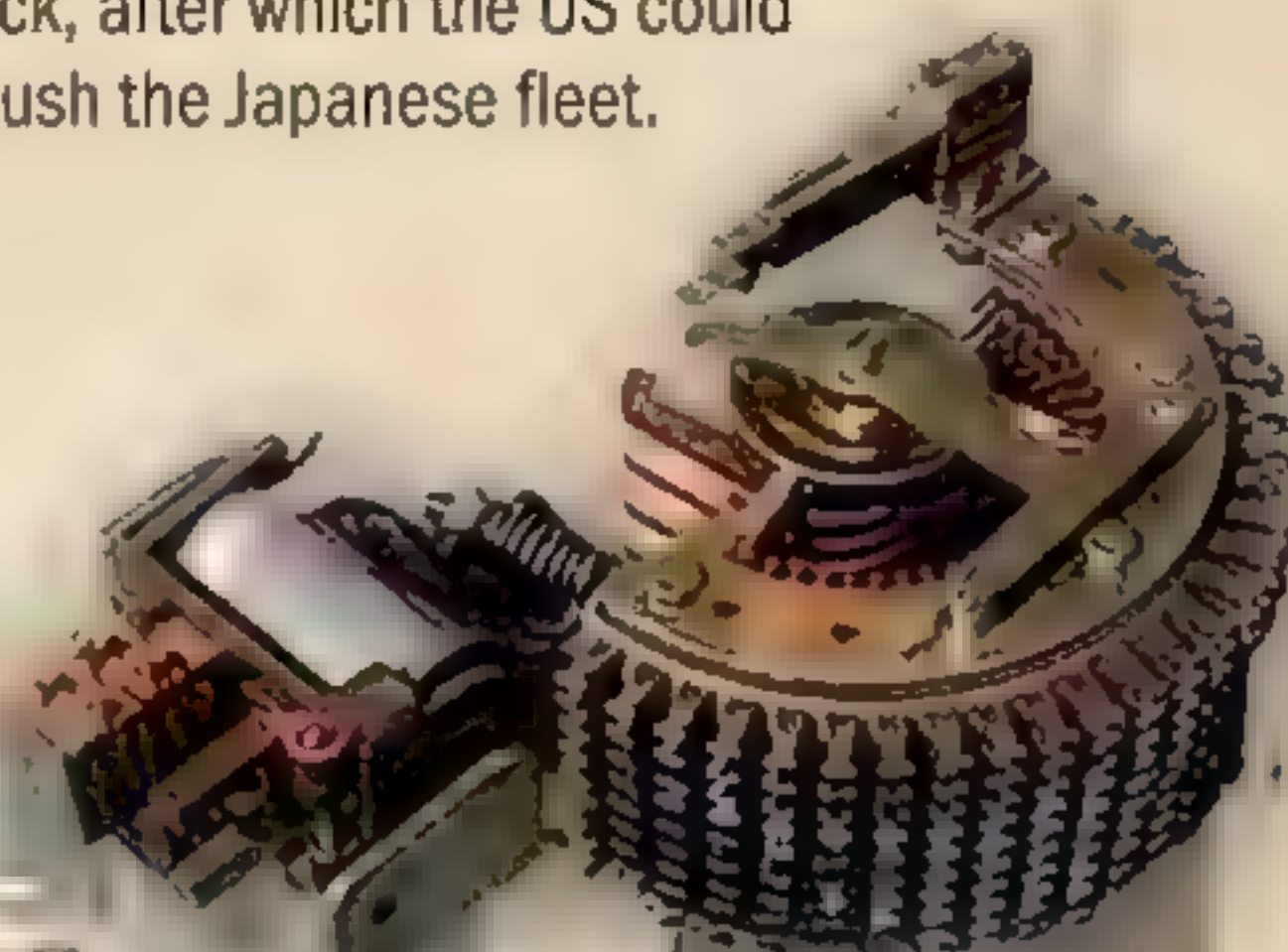
# Code-breakers predicted battle plans

Decoding Japanese messages turned out to be crucial to the US during the Pacific War – not least in connection with the Battle of Midway.

The United States' success during the Pacific War was not least down to the hundreds of women and men who toiled day and night to break Japanese codes. The deciphered messages in some cases allowed the Americans to peer over Japanese shoulders to predict the enemy's next move.

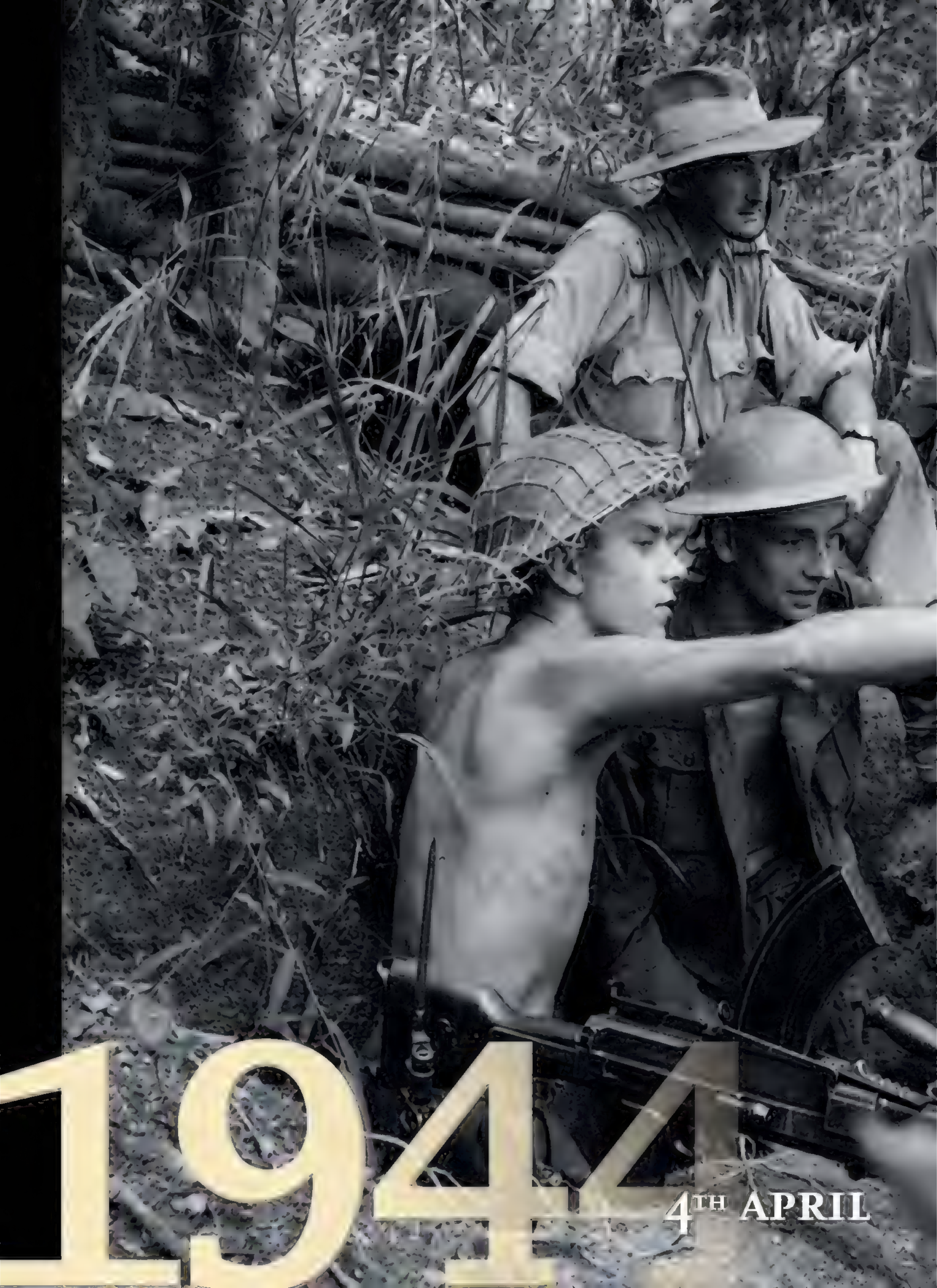
Most successful was the code-breakers' experience at the battle of Midway in mid-1942. Decoded messages revealed the date and place of the attack, after which the US could prepare itself optimally and crush the Japanese fleet.

*Japanese coding machines used rotors to encrypt messages.*



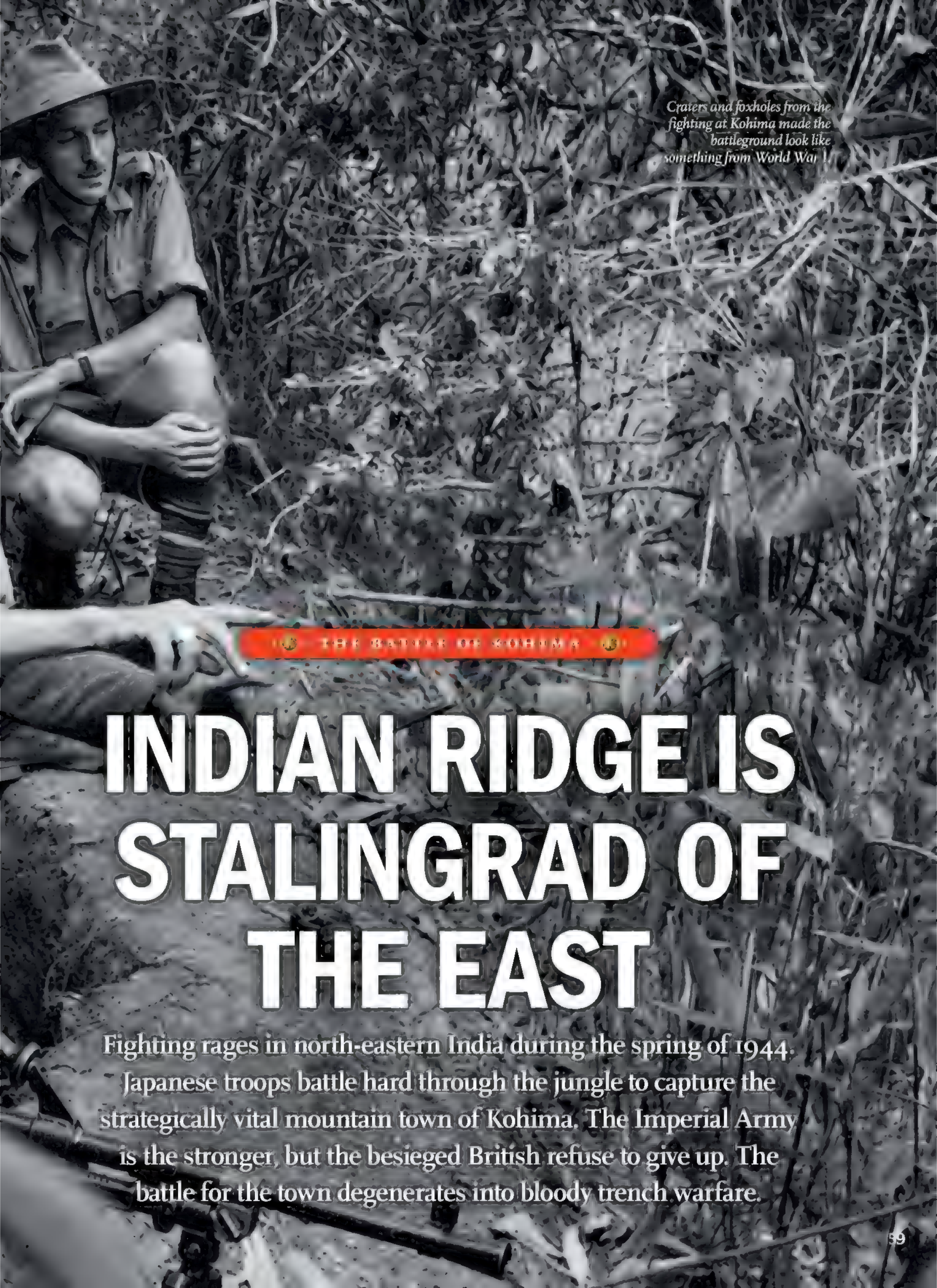
*Analysts in the United States Code Unit in Hawaii worked hard to crack Japanese codes.*





1944 4<sup>TH</sup> APRIL





*Craters and foxholes from the fighting at Kohima made the battleground look like something from World War I.*

THE BATTLE OF KOHIMA

# INDIAN RIDGE IS STALINGRAD OF THE EAST

Fighting rages in north-eastern India during the spring of 1944. Japanese troops battle hard through the jungle to capture the strategically vital mountain town of Kohima. The Imperial Army is the stronger, but the besieged British refuse to give up. The battle for the town degenerates into bloody trench warfare.



## THE STAGE IS SET



Japan's troops have lost their aura of invincibility and suffer several stinging defeats in the Pacific. The country's military leaders hope a campaign in Britain's colony of India will block Allied supply lines to the Asian fronts and reverse the war. But in India's jungle terrain, the Imperial Army runs into big problems.



**T**HE CONVOY OF BRITISH MILITARY TRUCKS wound its way slowly along steep roads in north-eastern India. Throughout the day the soldiers from the 4th Battalion of the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment had been crammed into the covered vehicles.

The Battalion's 446 men were on their way from the Allies' base in the city of Dimapur to the mountain town of Kohima, where the troops would help a hard-pressed garrison defend the area against Japanese forces. Kohima was only a small spot on the map, but the town was a strategic hub connecting

the Allies' important bases in the region. At the same time, the town was surrounded by rugged mountainous jungle terrain, making it an excellent defensive line.

Two months earlier, Japan had launched a campaign into India, and the British garrison at Kohima ridge now found itself directly threatened. The Imperial Army had already set up machine gun nests around large parts of the ridge as the procession of British trucks approached the garrison, located 1,500 metres above sea level.

Captain Donald Easten jumped down from one of the vehicles and called the men from D-Company together. But before he could address the soldiers, Japanese machine guns suddenly opened fire on the British.

"We just debussed and charged into the position where we were told roughly where to go", he later recalled.

At the same time, men from other British companies were seeking cover in deep ditches from where they could hear the screams of their less fortunate comrades who'd not taken cover and been hit by bullets and shrapnel.

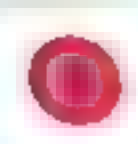
The men of the Royal West Kent Regiment had found themselves in the middle of an infernal firefight. As the hours passed, many of the lorries were alight, and much of the precious cargo and equipment had gone up in smoke. From his cover, C-Company's 24-year-old runner Raymond Street could see how some of trucks' Indian drivers were caught in the flames, while others ran back down the mountain in a wild panic.

The next day, Street realised the lorry drivers might have been the last to escape the mountain town alive. Over the radio, a message relayed that the enemy had now blocked the road back to Dimapur. At that moment, Captain Easten received discouraging news: eager Japanese troops were now attacking the Allied troops on the ridge. "The door was shut behind us and that was it", he said. They were surrounded.

### JAPANESE GENERAL WAS OBSESSED WITH INDIA

By May 1942 – two years before the Japanese laid siege to Kohima – the Imperial Army had occupied India's neighbour to the east, Burma. Subsequently, Japanese generals toyed with the idea of crossing the border and marching into the British colony throughout 1943 – without following through on any plans.

One Japanese officer – Lieutenant General Renya Mutaguchi – never gave up on the idea of invading eastern India where the Allies held important bases in the cities and Dimapur and Imphal. Allied planes flew supplies from these bases to the Chinese Nationalist Army,



NAME

**RENYA MUTAGUCHI**

TITLE

LIEUTENANT GENERAL

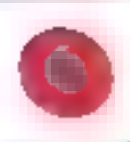
### General relied on blind faith

Renya Mutaguchi was the commander of Japan's forces in India, a general who acted on burning patriotism. Mutaguchi was known to attack the enemy with full force and expected his soldiers sacrifice themselves for their country. This approach was successful at the start of the war, but he paid dearly later on for his unswerving belief that Japan was invincible.

- Had a reputation for booze and women.
- Died aged 77 in 1966.



1888-1966



NAME

**KOTOKU SATO**

TITLE

LIEUTENANT GENERAL

### Besieger opposed campaign

Kotoku Sato had been in Burma with the 31st Division for six months when the lieutenant general was ordered to Kohima by his commander, Renya Mutaguchi. Sato knew the area's impenetrable jungle and predicted his troops would starve during the campaign. The general was extremely unhappy with an offensive he'd not even been consulted on. He believed Mutaguchi was foolish and the campaign was doomed to failure.

- Refused to commit ritual suicide.
- Died aged 65 in 1959.



1893-1959



*Sheltered by Kohima's ruins,  
Japanese troops forced the  
British back during the  
opening weeks of the siege.*





# Brits were sandwiched on Kohima's hill tops

Japan's campaign in India lasted five months. In particular, the siege of the strategically important town of Kohima became one of the bloodiest battles of the war. 1,500 Allied soldiers managed to resist a Japanese force ten times their size until British troops mounted a rescue.

## 3 Japanese are close to crushing the enemy

**4th-17th April:** Imperial troops attack the Allies at a tennis court in the northern part of the area while other forces capture Supply Hill and Kuki Piquet further south. The Japanese army has taken Kohima and almost wiped out the Allied forces.



The tennis court was the scene for Kohima's worst fighting and was eventually ruined.

## 4 Allied troops are relieved

**18th April:** British 2nd Division troops break the Japanese siege and arrive at the Kohima garrison. Wounded and exhausted soldiers are taken away and replaced with fresh troops. The British force the enemy on the defensive.

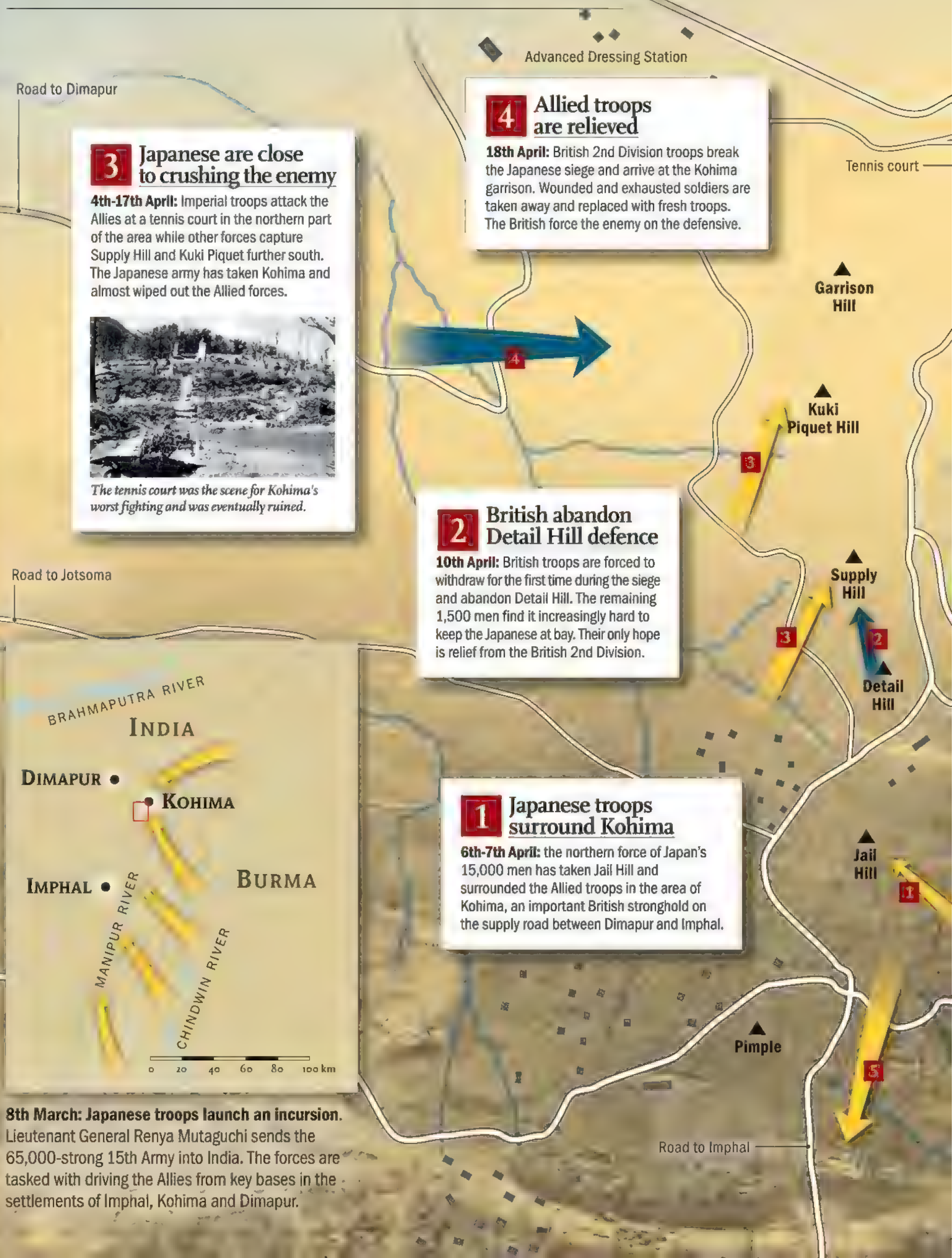
## 2 British abandon Detail Hill defence

**10th April:** British troops are forced to withdraw for the first time during the siege and abandon Detail Hill. The remaining 1,500 men find it increasingly hard to keep the Japanese at bay. Their only hope is relief from the British 2nd Division.

## 1 Japanese troops surround Kohima

**6th-7th April:** the northern force of Japan's 15,000 men has taken Jail Hill and surrounded the Allied troops in the area of Kohima, an important British stronghold on the supply road between Dimapur and Imphal.

**8th March:** Japanese troops launch an incursion. Lieutenant General Renya Mutaguchi sends the 65,000-strong 15th Army into India. The forces are tasked with driving the Allies from key bases in the settlements of Imphal, Kohima and Dimapur.







### **[5] Sato's troops flee from Kohima**

**3rd June:** after fighting the British 2nd Division for around six weeks, Lieutenant General Sato is forced to abandon Kohima. Supplies haven't arrived, and Sato's men are too exhausted and sick to continue fighting. The Imperial Army retreats to Burma.

which were a constant thorn in the side of Japanese occupation forces in east China.

Mutaguchi was commanding the troops in western Burma in March 1943, and he repeatedly tried to convince Imperial Army leaders that an Indian campaign was necessary. With Japanese troops suffering defeats in the Pacific and hungry for success, the head of the forces in Burma, General Masakazu Kawabe, finally agreed in March 1944. The general hoped a campaign in India would prevent the British from invading Burma – a real threat in the wake of Japan's series of defeats. Kawabe's simple demand was that Imphal and Dimapur be occupied before the monsoon season arrived in May, because the rain would turn the roads to mud and make transporting supplies impossible.

Mutaguchi sent his troops through the jungle on 8th March. Just over 75 percent of the attacking forces were directed towards Imphal in two groups, while Lieutenant General Kotoku Sato moved with 15,000 men on Kohima, which lay on the main supply route between Dimapur and Imphal.

Motor vehicles could not travel the winding and steep paths in the Indian countryside, so the Japanese were forced to make use of draft animals to get to the enemy's bases. 3,000 horses and 5,000 cattle were loaded with equipment and supplies while 10 elephants dragged 17 howitzers. Despite their lack of vehicles, the Imperial Army made swift progress. Scouts ran in advance and surveyed the width of upcoming rivers, so engineers could construct temporary bridges before the troops had to cross over.

By 4th April, Lieutenant General Sato was able to establish his headquarters in the jungle just six kilometres from Kohima. His troops were quickly deployed over the following two days to surround the Kohima ridge with a simple task: "Capture Kohima – at once".

In addition to the newly arrived lorry convoy delivering the West Kent troops, the British defenders comprised the Indian 7th Rajput Regiment, Nepalese Shere Regiment and a

*Gurkhas and British troops worked together to break the siege of Kohima.*





local Assam Regiment. They were a tenth the size of the Japanese forces, and the British now had no means of escape. Capturing the town seemed a straightforward task, and no one among the Japanese considered the fighting at Kohima would develop into one of the worst battles of the war.

### TRENCH WARFARE BEGAN ON DETAIL HILL

Once Easten and Street had received an overview of Kohima's defences, they were immediately concerned. The motley collection of local soldiers took their total strength to 1,500 men. The troops would have to live up to the words of the Allied commander in India, William Slim, who'd announced that Kohima must be kept at all costs, since recapturing it would prove almost impossible. Slim had reassured his troops a few weeks previously that the so-called "invincible" Japanese could be defeated, and that they were the men to do it.

The nerves were jangling for Street and Easten, while Slim – from his position far from the front – had deliberately

allowed the Japanese to advance swiftly through the jungle to stretch their supply lines. Slim had ordered new troops be deployed to Dimapur and Kohima, but the modest British defence force would have to hold out for a long time while reinforcements were shipped over 3,000 kilometres by train.

The Royal West Kent Regiment had brought four smaller guns to augment the defences, which already included several grenade launchers and one major field gun – a 25-pounder, which stood on Garrison Hill at the heart of the British-controlled area. Both Street and Easten were well aware the Japanese had far more grenade launchers and guns available to them.

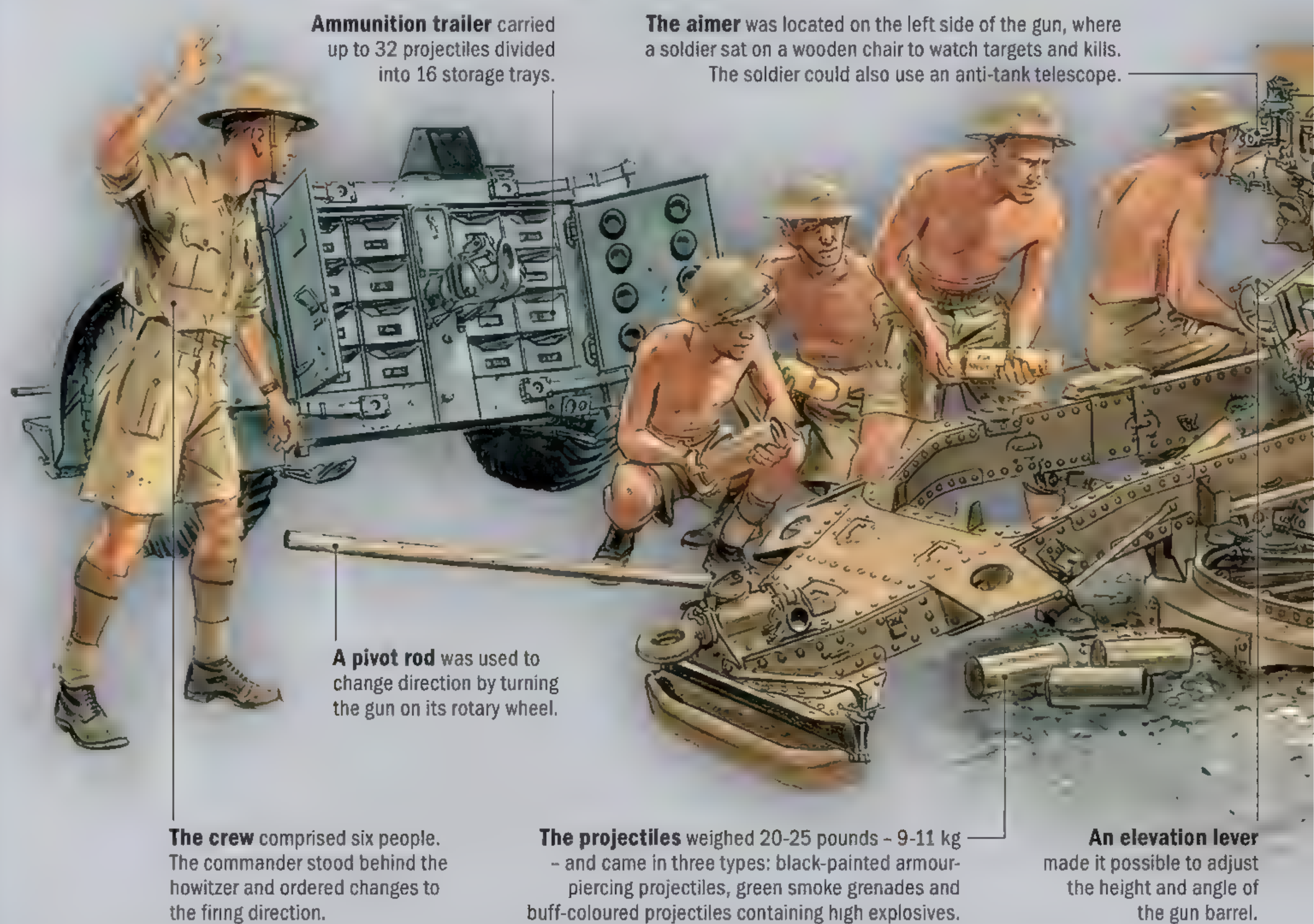
On 6th April, Street's company had barely dug into foxholes on Detail Hill in the southern part of the British zone before a hail of shells rained down. The sounds of explosions and screaming filled the air. Every time a mortar hit the tree tops, the fragments speared down directly into the foxholes, drilling into the soldiers.

It wasn't until darkness before the bombardment halted, but shortly after, another terrifying sound was heard: "They made a hell of a racket, blowing bugles, screaming and shouting, psyching themselves up for the charge", Street later recounted.

## FIELD GUN

# Heavy gun fired three types of projectile

Heavy 25-pounders were the Allies' best weapon against the Japanese at Kohima. The howitzer's versatile projectiles were effective against both soldiers and tanks, and the gun was crucial in forcing Japan back.



**Ammunition trailer** carried up to 32 projectiles divided into 16 storage trays.

**The aimer** was located on the left side of the gun, where a soldier sat on a wooden chair to watch targets and kills. The soldier could also use an anti-tank telescope.

**A pivot rod** was used to change direction by turning the gun on its rotary wheel.

**The crew** comprised six people. The commander stood behind the howitzer and ordered changes to the firing direction.

**The projectiles** weighed 20-25 pounds – 9-11 kg – and came in three types: black-painted armour-piercing projectiles, green smoke grenades and buff-coloured projectiles containing high explosives.

**An elevation lever** made it possible to adjust the height and angle of the gun barrel.



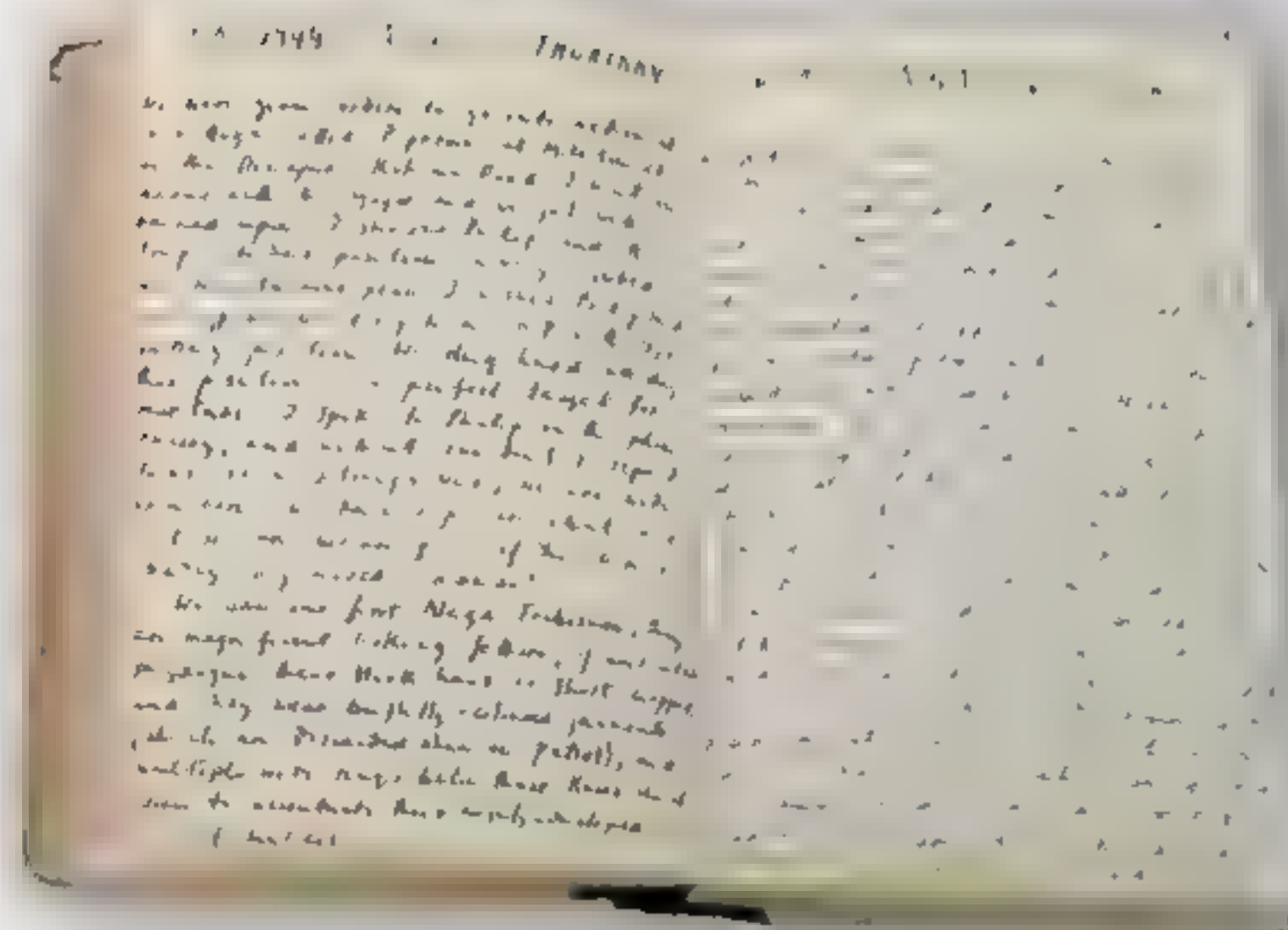
In the moonlight from the top of Detail Hill, the 24-year-old runner could see the Japanese storming the hill where the British were ready with machine guns and mortars of their own.

"We cut them to ribbons but they still got through, there were that many of them", Street remembered. Over the next two days, the Japanese slowly forced the men of C-Company back, and Captain Easten, together with part of D-Company, had to rescue his countrymen. By his side Easten had one of his most trusted soldiers, Corporal John Harman. The 29-year-old immediately threw himself into an extremely dangerous venture.

"Give me covering fire!" Harman ordered before storming an enemy foxhole, rifle in hand. Machine gun bullets flew around the corporal, but the Briton miraculously escaped, throwing himself into the foxhole before directing his rifle at the Japanese, killing four of them. The fifth was just about to fire when Harman drove his bayonet through the Japanese soldier's body.

The corporal heard the roaring cheers from his comrades, but their joy was short-lived. On his way back to the British positions, the corporal was hit in the back by a series of machine gun bullets just short of Easten's foxhole. Easten

*A British lieutenant wrote in his diary about operations in Kohima.*



called desperately for a stretcher and crept up to his wounded soldier.

"Don't bother Sir... I got the lot. It was worth it", he told his superior officer, who held the corporal until Harman died.

Less than 24 hours later, it was Easten who nearly lost his life. A shell struck near the captain, who fell so violently his spine was dislocated. At the same time, a shell fragment paralysed his arm. As the captain was being carried to the Advanced Dressing Station he saw how the land had been scarred with bomb craters and how the trees had been bombed on the hills. The sight was reminiscent of the scenes from World War I.

On 10th April, Detail Hill was abandoned to the enemy, and Street left the hill along with the rest of the area's surviving British forces. He never forgot the sight and smell when, during the retreat, he turned to view the hill one last time:

"The Japs moved forward into vacated front-line trenches. They removed the bodies of the dead men, theirs and ours, poured petrol over them and set them alight. We then watched our comrades burn. The stench of burning flesh was terrible and upsetting".

### JAPANESE LIVED ON RICE BALLS

Although Lieutenant General Sato was pleased with his soldiers' progress in Kohima, the army's commander was well aware of smouldering unrest among his troops. Although Sato's forces gained further ground on 14th April to squeeze the British into an area half a kilometre square, many Japanese soldiers had begun to collapse through hunger.

Only 20 percent of the Imperial Army's draft animals had reached the front line, which meant the Japanese had been left with severely limited supplies. Oxen were slaughtered to sate the troops' hunger, but slaughtering the draft animals simply exacerbated their supply crisis. Mutaguchi had promised Sato 10 tonnes a day, but the reality was far short. And although the troops went hunting for rice from the local inhabitants, there was never enough to fill the Imperial Army's stomachs.

The lack of nutrition also reduced the army's resistance to disease, and doctors found themselves treating endless cases of dysentery in particular. Diarrhoea ran down soldiers' legs in the trenches, and the stench was almost overwhelming.

The British fared little better. In mid-April the Japanese blocked a stream that was the defenders' only source of drinking water. The loss led to soldiers being rationed just half a litre of water daily, which was barely enough to survive on in the tropical heat. On the other hand, unlike the Japanese, the British did receive supplies from US aircraft, which dropped containers containing supplies on to the ridge in clear weather. The sound of the planes was sweet music for the besieged, but hopes often evaporated into frustration:

"Water was dropped in petrol cans and we watched in despair as the Japs shot holes in the them as they

The gun barrel's calibre was 87.6 millimetres. Shells could hit a target 12 kilometres away.

A leather bag hung on the right side and served as storage for the aimer when the gun wasn't in use.

Ordnance QF 25-pounder

A rotary wheel under the gun could be rotated to adjust the weapon's shooting direction.







hung from the trees", Street recalled. "Some of the water cans tore loose from their chutes and crashed into the ground, bursting on impact. The water quickly soaked into the dry ground as thirsty men helplessly looked on."

The Allied airlift to Kohima was so imprecise that half the supplies floated down to enemy lines or ended up in no-man's land between the trenches.

For the Imperial Army troops, the enemy's field rations – which they dubbed "Churchill's rations" – were an unaccustomed luxury. Japanese supply officer Chuzaburo Tomaru remembered especially the "delicious" taste of canned cheese and the exquisite sense of chewing gum and smoking a cigarette. Japan's own field rations usually consisted of a handful of boiled rice balls rolled in the palms of the hand.

The bonus of getting Allied supplies was not enough to have a positive impact on the Japanese

*The 2nd Division's emblem was two crossed keys – the division beat back the Japanese at Kohima.*



supply problem, however. The Japanese fought bravely despite hunger and thirst, and the besieging army still had the advantage of numerical superiority. Allied defenders could only take irregular, short breaks from the front line and were on the verge of exhaustion. The Japanese could – on the other hand – swap out soldiers and constantly attack using well-rested troops.

### BLOOD FLOWED ON THE TENNIS COURT

While imperial forces continued to press Street and Easten's companies on the hills in the south, the Japanese launched an attack in the north, where local District Commissioner Charles Pawsey had lived in a bungalow complete with tennis court for years.

"A hell of a din arose from the tennis court", recalled Lieutenant John Faulkner, who was sat in a bunker close by, where racquets and balls had been replaced by guns and bullets.

The Japanese raced repeatedly up the hill towards the far end of the court, but became easy victims on the tennis lawn.

"Wave after wave we cut them down with machine guns. I didn't know if I was killing one or a dozen. I just swept the machine gun through 'em and that was it", said Lance Corporal Dennis Wykes of A-Company.

The British didn't escape lightly, however, and Wykes witnessed shell fragments tear through a comrade's stomach.

"Don't let me die. Don't let me die", cried the soldier.

Fighting on the tennis court raged fiercely from 9th-13th April, when the Japanese kept storming towards the British at half-hour intervals. At times, life or death was fought in close combat. Mark Lambert had to kick and punch or use his rifle butt as a deadly weapon. "You don't forget that kind of thing. From both sides we were animals", he later recalled.

On the morning of 14th April, Lambert and his compatriots were finally afforded a breather when the Japanese finally halted their kamikaze-like onslaught.

The situation remained critical, however. By 16th April, the Allies had just 700 battle-ready soldiers left on the ridge. Sustained attacks had seen the Japanese take both Supply and Kuki Piquet Hills to the south on 17th April, where Easten had returned to the front with his arm in a sling. The captain was proud of his countrymen who'd fought bravely during his absence, but their despondency was clear to see. Everyone knew it was a matter of days – or even hours – before the Japanese overwhelmed the last British defences.

### THE JAPANESE WERE FORCED OUT OF INDIA

On 15th April, radio communications had promised reinforcements in the form of the 2nd Division, which was approaching Kohima with artillery, tanks and thousands of soldiers. But by the 17th, the besieged still hadn't seen a glimpse of the relief troops.

"Come on chaps, it's not as bad as all that", Easten said, trying to rally the soldiers who'd retreated to Garrison Hill. But the men knew how critical the situation was. In the evening, many of the exhausted soldiers put their hands together to pray for help to come and end the nightmare.

Their prayers were quickly answered when, early in the



morning of 18th April, a crash rang out in the distance. The roar came from powerful guns that had been set up by the 2nd Division, just a few kilometres from the ridge. Shortly after, the besieged British troops watched as shells struck the Japanese positions on the hills.

Soon the relief troops were tumbling through the Japanese roadblocks and tanks rolling up towards Garrison Hill as the defenders now realised their rescue was a reality.

On his way from the front, Wykes was met by his relief who shouted "Well done lads" to the lance corporal and other members of the company. The soldiers from the Royal West Kent Regiment knew their heroic defence against superior forces had been critical.

The Allies' fresh troops turned the battle and forced Sato's army on the defensive. Although the Japanese continued fighting, their lack of supplies determined their ultimate fate. In

late April, Sato told Mutaguchi that the troops were pushed to breaking point, but the stubborn general refused to let the Imperial Army withdraw its strength from Kohima. For another month, emaciated Japanese fought on the ridge until Sato took matters into his own hands and pulled back in early June.

"We have fought for two months with the utmost courage, and have reached the limits of human fortitude. Our swords are broken and our arrows gone. Shedding bitter tears, I now leave Kohima", Sato messaged Mutaguchi.

The defeat was stinging, and soon the forces at Imphal were also retreating – the failure was total. The Battle of Kohima was later dubbed "East Stalingrad" because the Imperial Army's defeat marked a turning point in the war. It was the first time a Japanese offensive had been halted on the Asian mainland.

The humiliated Japanese Army withdrew to Burma. The Allies now knew the imperial troops could be defeated.

## PERSPECTIVE

# Japanese on the run succumbed to hunger and disease

After the defeat at Kohima and Imphal, the Imperial Army's forces fled back to Burma. Illness, hunger and fatigue meant that only around half of the 65,000 Japanese soldiers survived the failed campaign. The route back to Burma was dubbed the Road of Bones, because the ditches were filled with fallen Japanese soldiers.

The battles in the trenches of Kohima lasted over 79 days and were costly to both sides. Around 4,000 Allied and 6,000 Japanese soldiers were either killed or wounded on the ridge, but for the Japanese the torment continued during their retreat to Burma.

The monsoons made it a road to hell for surviving Japanese troops, who had to drag thousands of wounded comrades to the

south-east. Supplies did not arrive as promised, and hunger drained the men of both their strength and will.

Emaciated soldiers dropped into the ditches and diseases such as beriberi, dysentery and malaria claimed even more lives. Only around half of the campaign's 65,000 men reached Burma, and the survivors returned home as ghost-like skeletons.

*The defeats in India were hard on Japanese soldiers who fell like flies on their way back to Burma*





Soldiers sweat in tropical heat  
on New Guinea. Life on the bases  
consisted of sharp bursts of activity  
interspersed by long periods of boredom.





A color photograph of a tropical beach scene. In the foreground, three soldiers are walking away from the camera on a sandy path. The soldier on the left is wearing a full military uniform and a helmet. The other two soldiers are shirtless and wearing dark trousers. In the background, there are several palm trees and a body of water. A small boat is visible in the distance. The sky is blue with some clouds. The overall atmosphere is peaceful despite the military presence.

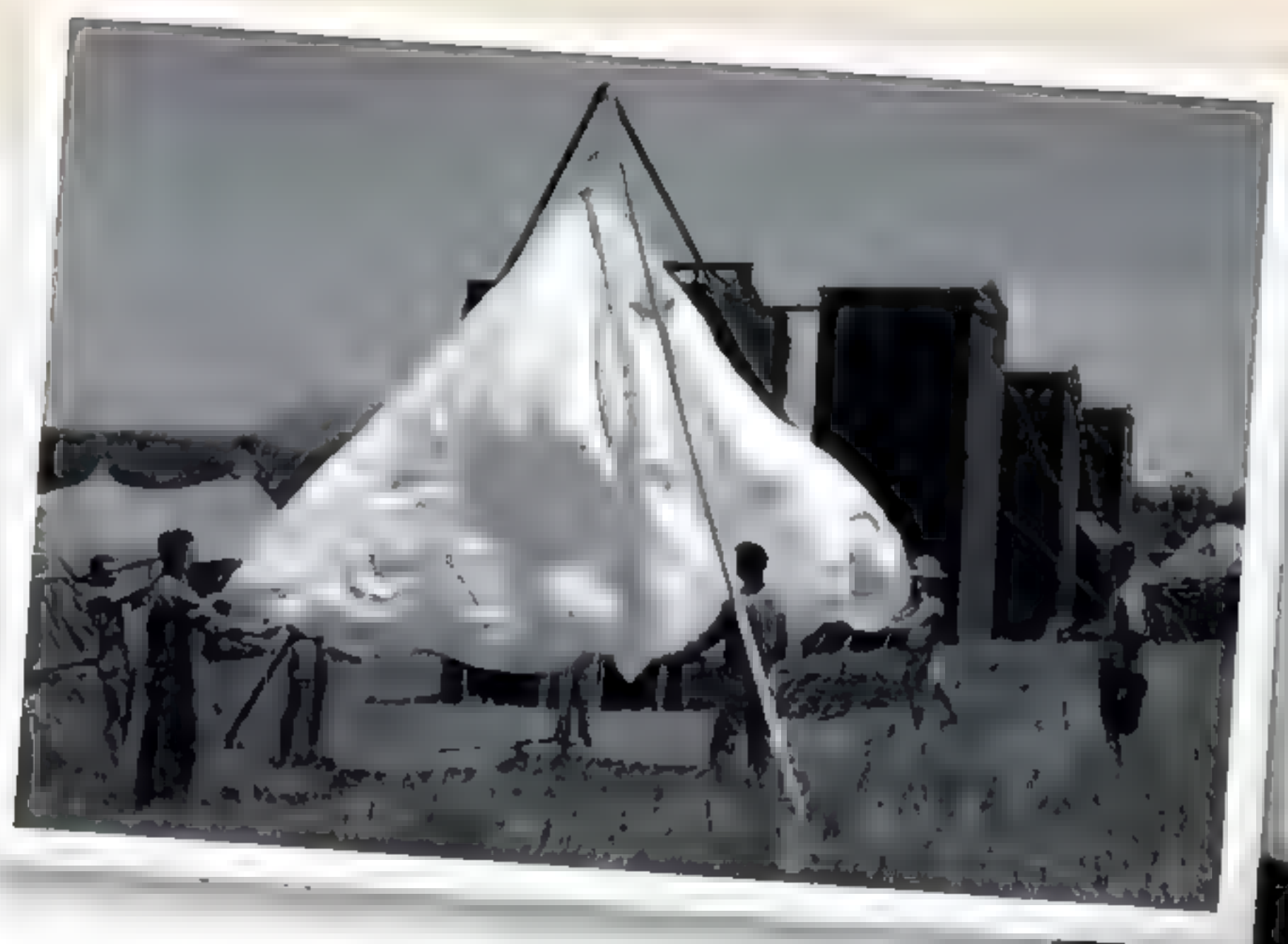
WORLD WAR II IN THE PACIFIC

# BASES BECOME SOLDIERS' SECOND HOME

Thousands of Americans join the army to avenge the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The men are stationed at bases throughout the Pacific far from the United States. Soldiers combine practical duties with sport and music to create a tolerable everyday life between deadly missions.



Dirt and leaves are removed from a parachute using a large tripod. The huts in the background are used to dry the silks.



**A B-25 bomber from the Fourteenth Air Force refuels and takes on bombs, ammunition and fresh supplies from a base in China after a successful raid against Japanese forces at Hankou. All resupplying takes place simultaneously, allowing the aircraft to return to the air as soon as possible with a fresh crew.**





**Aerial photographs of Tokyo** are closely studied on an American base on the island of Saipan after a test bombing on 15th January, 1945. Specialists assess the damage to determine the effectiveness of the raid. Selected pictures were also published in US newspapers.

## MILITARY CHORES

### The war was well-prepared

An effective war effort was dependent on thorough preparation and accurate intelligence. At the bases around the Pacific, soldiers were drilled before invasions of Japanese-occupied islands. The Americans quickly learned that the empire's soldiers defended themselves fanatically and always fought to the last man. Well-planned exercises under realistic conditions were the best life insurance for men.

Also, planes had to be carefully checked between each raid to avoid accidents, so post-analysis of the missions were given a high priority.



**An explosive goes off** during a landing exercise in Australia. Planners made sure that exercises came as close as possible to reality to prepare the soldiers physically and mentally.



**Soldiers snatch a ride on a bomb train** that is being transported to waiting aircraft at a base in 1944. The explosives were not armed, so the men ran no risk that the bombs would go off.


**Sailors' uniforms** were kept perfectly clean, even though clothes on the bases were relaxed.







**Private David Goldstein cuts a slice of bread** for Sergeant Karol Walczak in December 1944. Many bases had their own bakeries that made bread that was like that baked back in the US. Many bakeries were mobile, so they could quickly be transported to another island.



Pith helmets provided good protection against the heat, which was an ever-present burden.

## EVERYDAY CHORES

### Soldiers had to be practical

Naturally waging war was the primary role of any soldier, but they also had to carry out several everyday duties. In a time when women were primarily responsible for household chores, many men weren't used to cleaning and washing clothes. There was no avoiding either duty on the bases, however. Whether a private or far up the ranks, army personnel were forced to tow the line.

Food was an important. On permanent bases there were large kitchens and also bakeries that delivered food designed to be the same as the men enjoyed at home, but with the Allies advancing from autumn 1942, new bases were often set up hastily. If a kitchen couldn't be established, the food was typically delivered in cardboard boxes. Supplies could be transported for days and were notorious for being dull and boring.



**A marine says a private prayer** before an attack in New Guinea in 1944. The soldiers themselves had built the chapel, which in addition to worship was also used as memorials for the fallen.



**Sergeant Henry Roth of the Navy Corps** hangs out the laundry in the summer of 1943 in the South Pacific. The sergeant was, like many, forced to take their turn with the laundry service.



The fleet deployed special postcards, where the soldiers could simply cross out irrelevant sentences and leave the rest.

THIS SIDE OF CARD IS FOR ADDRESS

*Mrs. Joyce Ingram*

NOTHING IS TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE EXCEPT TO FILL IN THE DATA SPECIFIED

SENTENCES OR WORDS NOT REQUIRED SHOULD BE CROSSED OUT

Well and safe ~~regarding~~ (all my love)  
 Greetings, give my best regards to all my friends  
 Birthday greetings, want happy returns  
 Have received your (letter) (telegram) (parcel) (news)  
 Writing at first opportunity  
 Have not heard from you lately (for a long time)  
 I have been (admitted to hospital) (sick) (wounded) (injured) (not serious)  
 My address is U. S. S. Tangier (AV8), % Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, California.  
 S.S. date *Mar 13-1943*

IN REPLYING TO THE SENDER OF THIS CARD, NAME OF SHIP  
 MUST BE USED IN ADDITION TO NAME OF POST OFFICE



Postmaster General Frank C Walker wrote about the role of mail in 1942: "It is almost impossible to over-stress the importance of this mail. It is so essential to morale that army and navy officers of the highest rank list mail almost on a level with munitions and food."

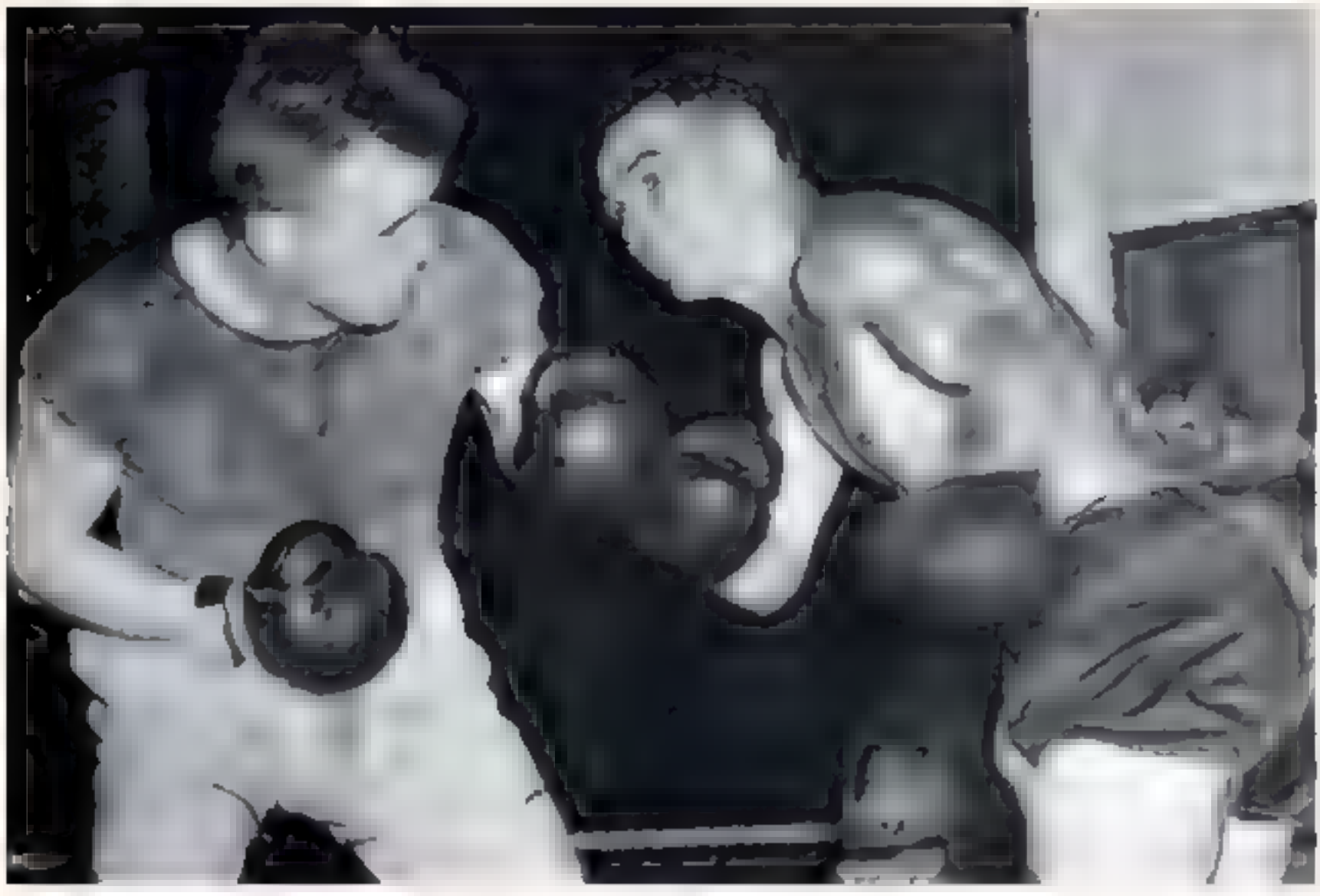


Smoking was widespread. Even non-smokers took up cigarettes during long stays at the bases.



**Soldiers struggle to get a glimpse** of the actor and clarinetist Artie Shaw's Navy Band in October 1943. Between the rare visits of professional acts, soldiers from many units formed bands like the marines' First Division (inset).





**Sergeant Danny Keefe and Private Joseph Tierney** let the gloves speak in a fight in October 1944. Boxing was popular – also as a spectator sport. Keefe won the bout on the judge's decision.



**Softball** could be played with minimal equipment and was one of the soldiers' favourite activities. On many bases, people formed teams that competed in hastily assembled leagues.

## RECREATION

### Leisure time to kill

Life on the bases varied between fervent activity and deep boredom. During the periods when men did not have much to do, they passed time with sports, games and hobbies. Gambling was widespread – not least poker – and some often waged a full month's salary.

On many bases, soldiers had to play sport with what they could find, but some had equipment for volleyball or American football. Books were also in short supply, but civilians donated second-hand books to the army, which were distributed around the bases.

The army also did its part to keep boredom at bay. Newspapers like *Stars and Stripes* appeared daily and popular artists and showgirls were hired and flown to bases to provide some much-needed entertainment.



**Dancer Patty Thomas** performs a dance, a so-called boomps-a-daisy, with an unknown soldier. Thomas was a part of Bob Hope's comedy revue, which toured throughout the war.

**Officer Ensign Turk** works on a model plane at the Pearl Harbor base.







1944

20TH OCTOBER



*Douglas MacArthur  
ensured that the  
photographers were in place  
before he waded ashore.*

Douglas MacArthur

BATTLE OF BAYBE GULF

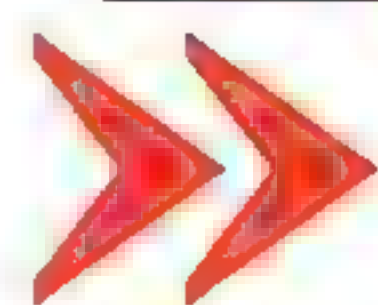
# AMERICANS INVADE THE PHILIPPINES

After more than two years of Japanese occupation, General MacArthur returns to the Philippines. The Japanese are forced to deploy the navy's main strength in an attempt to slow down the flow of soldiers and equipment rolling ashore. But the invasion has catastrophic consequences for the empire.



## Philippines, 1944

## THE STAGE IS SET



When the Japanese seize the Philippines in 1941, General Douglas MacArthur is forced to flee, but swears to return. In 1944, he's ready to fulfil his vow. MacArthur's invasion force is defended by a strong armada under the command of Admiral William Halsey, but the Japanese are preparing a clever ruse to lure Halsey away.



**T**HE GUNS ON NEARBY WARSHIPS THUNDERED AS Douglas MacArthur quietly buttoned his khaki-coloured shirt and tightened the belt firmly around his stomach in his cabin on the *USS Nashville*. The crashes sounded almost like sweet music to the general who'd been looking forward to the day when Americans would begin their liberation expedition to the Philippines. Just over two years previously, MacArthur had been forced to leave the island state when the Japanese landed. Now the 64-year-old would finally get his rematch.

MacArthur placed his gold-plated cap carefully on his head, and then slid an old pistol into one trouser pocket just as his intelligence officer Courtney Whitney entered the cabin.

"That, Court, belonged to my father," MacArthur explained. "I take it merely as a precaution – just to insure that I am never captured alive." The general picked up his beloved corncob pipe before following his countryman out of the door.

Up on the *Nashville's* bridge, the Americans could spy the island of Leyte, where the landing would take place. The sky was shrouded in smoke from the fleet's bombardment, but the white sandy beaches were still visible. Apparently, there was no retaliatory shelling from the coast. A war correspondent with access to the bridge asked the general how

he thought it was going. "It's going fine", replied MacArthur, without taking his eyes from the beach. "I believe they'll be a little softer now. But, soft or not, we'll get them."

After victory in the Battle of the Philippine Sea in June 1944, when the US Navy had crushed the Japanese fleet by sinking three aircraft carriers and shooting down 500 aircraft, the US had become the superior force in the Pacific. During 1944, the Japanese lost ships totalling two million tonnes – the equivalent of over 30 aircraft carriers – and the mother country's shipyards were in no way capable of replacing the losses. In addition, severed supply lines meant the empire lacked oil, minerals and food.

The Japanese were, however, conditioned never to give up and when leading generals gathered in Tokyo in October, they assured Emperor Hirohito that everything had not yet been lost. Virtually all the remaining naval strength would be deployed to face the Americans in a decisive battle in the Philippines. Admiral Soemu Toyoda's plan of redemption – Operation *Sho-Go* (Victory) – would see two major naval forces defeat the American armada in the Philippines.

### MACARTHUR GOT HIS WAY

From the US standpoint, an invasion of the Philippines wasn't strictly necessary, as the main objective of the war was the Japanese mainland. However, the Philippines housed airbases that the US could use to stage sorties against the Japanese mother country. Strategically, the Americans would also be able to cut Japan completely off from oil and other supplies from the Dutch East Indies.


Several generals had reservations about the invasion, but MacArthur forced through his demands. The former defender of the Philippines was obsessed with the idea of liberating the islands as soon as possible, based on his promise to the Philippine people – made shortly before his flight in March 1942 – that he would return.

The plan was to land on Leyte, which was not nearly as well-defended as the Philippines's largest islands. Leyte lay roughly in the middle of the archipelago, and based here, the US had a good base from which to invade the surrounding islands – not least Luzon and the capital, Manila.

MacArthur craved expelling the Japanese from the Philippines, and he had the strength to do it. He revealed in a letter to his wife the evening before the invasion how the fleet

### Around 3,000

Philippine guerrilla soldiers operated on the side of the Allies in Leyte. They went in after the invasion to help US forces with their local knowledge.



**WILLIAM FREDERICK HALSEY**

NAME

TITLE ADMIRAL


**"The Bull" would always attack**

William Halsey, nicknamed "Bull", was on assignment with the *USS Enterprise* at the end of 1941, so wasn't in port when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, but his hatred was set. "Before we're through with them, the Japanese language will be spoken only in hell", he raged when he arrived at Pearl Harbor.

Halsey later became commander of the Third Fleet, and gained a reputation as the US's toughest fighting admiral – always ready to attack the enemy.

➤ Drank 14 cups of coffee daily.

➤ Took part in Japan's surrender.



1882-1959



– numbering over 600 – stretched as far as the horizon in whichever direction he looked.

At 09.30 on 20th October, the bay to the east of Leyte was filled – not just with large ships, but dozens of landing craft. As the battleships intensified their bombardment of the beach, the landing forces crawled with weapons down the netting on the sides of each ship before jumping into the rocking Higgins boats.

Boat after boat was filled up. At 09.43 the engines were fired up, and the small vessels shot towards the coast at speeds no less than 20 km/h. At 10.00 the first boats struck land, their ramps dropped and the soldiers poured out. Without stopping to take aim, the men fired in the direction of the palm trees at the beach's edge. But it soon became clear to the Americans that the enemy had abandoned the outer defences after the fleet's heavy bombardment.

That said, as soon as the troops dared to venture into the dense jungle behind the beach, several of the first wave were hit by bullets from Japanese snipers. Most Japanese soldiers, however, were positioned on the rainforest-clad hills, from where they soon started to shell the beach. Moments of nervousness and uncertainty prevailed among the Americans, but gradually the soldiers were able to take out the nearest guns and secure bridgeheads along the landing beaches. Overall, US losses were moderate, and the Japanese were only able to provide sporadic resistance to the 60,000 soldiers who landed.

### FREEDOM'S VOICE RESOUNDED

The beaches were still under fire when Douglas MacArthur arrived with the third American wave. The general had – with

his usual flair for self-promotion – ensured that photographers had come to shore ahead of him. Wearing his trademark aviator sunglasses, the general waded with decisive steps and swinging arms through the water as the saviour of the Philippines.

Without worrying about shells and guns from the hinterland, MacArthur observed the beach and vehicles that were gradually coming ashore, after which he strode towards a table. Here, technicians were preparing a radio transmission that could be heard in Filipino homes. When the last cables were in place, the general took hold of the microphone:

"People of the Philippines: I have returned. By the grace of Almighty God, our forces stand again on Philippine soil."

As the general continued his speech, the Japanese Navy made ready for its ambitious attempt to halt the enemy's march in the Pacific. Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita's main force had sailed from northern Borneo, and its number included the gargantuan battleships *Yamato* and *Musashi*, which

at 70,000 tonnes each were the largest and most heavily armed battleships the world had seen. The metal giants steered towards San Bernardino Strait north of Leyte, where they would attack the Americans in Leyte Bay from the north while a smaller group of ships under Vice Admiral Shoji Nishimura would attack from the south. This pincer movement was – the Japanese hoped – the key to defeating the much larger enemy fleet.

Soemu Toyoda, the Japanese commander-in-chief, had one major problem: only a few Japanese aircraft carriers were still available in the Pacific, and they were almost worthless, as the empire did not have enough aircraft or pilots to man them. Therefore, Toyoda opted to use four aircraft



*The Iron Knights in the 9th Attack Squadron were among the first US troops to land.*



*After landing, soldiers from the 1st Cavalry Division crossed a water-filled anti-tank barrier left by Japanese troops.*



# Philippine invasion proved costly

Philippines's many islands were hard to take. From the initial landing on the island of Leyte, Americans had to fight for almost six months before reaching the capital, Manila.



## 5 Luzon invaded

■ **9th January, 1945:** the US 6th Army under Walter Krueger's command commences the invasion of Luzon. The Americans land on the north and west side of the island, where in one day they set up a bridgehead that is 34 kilometres long and up to six kilometres deep.

## 6 Capital falls

■ **3rd March:** after a month of fierce urban warfare, the Philippines' capital Manila finally falls. The invasion has taken many American and Japanese lives, but the civilian population is also hit hard with 100,000 killed.

## 4 Americans secure airbases

■ **15th December:** MacArthur sends a battle group from Leyte to Mindoro, where soldiers must establish airbases to support the upcoming US attack on the Philippines' main island, Luzon.

US FORCES	
SOLDIERS:	1,250,000
DEAD:	13,900
WOUNDED:	48,500

JAPANESE FORCES	
SOLDIERS:	430,000
DEAD:	336,400
WOUNDED:	12,600





### **1** Army lands easily

■ **20th October, 1944:** under cover from naval artillery, 60,000 Americans land at Leyte and establish bridgeheads – one near the island's capital Tacloban, and another 18 kilometres to the south. Resistance is weak.

### **2** Naval attacks are in vain

■ **23rd-26th October:** in an attempt to halt the Allied landings, the Japanese begin one of history's largest naval battles in and around Leyte Bay. The imperial fleet suffers huge losses.

### **3** Kamikaze pilot sinks ship

■ **25th October:** the Japanese use suicide aircraft for the first time. When a Zero plane hammers into *USS St Lo*, the escort carrier sinks in under an hour.

*Despite kamikaze attacks, the US Navy got off relatively lightly during the naval battle due to Japan's failed strategy.*



carriers as bait. The admiral sent the vessels to a position a good distance away from Leyte in the north and prayed the enemy would detect them and send their largest ships away from the Leyte area.

"If the worst should happen, there was a chance that we would lose the entire fleet. But I felt that chance had to be taken... There would be no sense in saving the fleet at the expense of the loss of the Philippines", Toyoda wrote later.

For Vice Admiral Kurita, who was to carry out the plans at sea, it was clear that this was going to be a task that would require divine intervention:

"You must remember that there are such things as miracles", he reminded officers in his final pep talk. The first

surprise that the Japanese experienced was a negative one, however. The imperial fleet's pride, the super battleship *Musashi*, was considered invincible thanks to her thick armour plating and compartmentalised hull. But on the way to the San Bernardino Strait and Leyte on 23rd October, two US submarines discovered the Japanese. In addition to sinking a few cruisers, crew members alerted fleet commanders, who deployed hundreds of planes with one specific target in mind: *Musashi*.

### HALSEY CHASED GHOSTS

Next morning, fighter planes, dive bombers and torpedo bombers thundered down between Japan's massive anti-aircraft guns. Although several planes crashed in the sea, *Musashi* was unable to see off the attacks. She was hit by 11 bombs and

## LANDING CRAFT

# Higgins boats were crucial for the landings

In the Philippines, the Higgins boat proved worth its worth yet again. In the fast and low-bottomed vessel, soldiers were able to come through the surf and land unharmed.

**Machine guns:** two calibre .30 M1919 machine guns at the back for responding to enemy fire.

**Driver's seat:** the helmsman was also at the back of the boat, so he had a better view and was at less risk of being hit.

Higgins boat



LCVP (Higgins boat)

Length	11 metres
Breadth	3.4 metres
Weight	8.2 tonnes
Depth	0.66 metres (forward) and 0.91 metres (aft)
Engine power	225-250 hp
Top speed	22 km/h (17 km/h with full load)

**Sides:** the high sides protected against large waves from the surf on the invasion beaches. They were, however, made of plywood, so offered little protection against bullets.



torpedoes, which forced seawater into three of the battleship's four engine rooms. At 19.35, *Musashi* sank and took more than 1,000 men with her into the depths – among them her captain, who stood on the bridge to go down with his ship. Several other ships were also heavily damaged. The only remaining hope now was that the enemy took the bait.

On the American battleship *USS New Jersey*, Admiral William Halsey was annoyed even though his aircraft had just sunk the enemy's flagship. Ideally, the admiral would like to hit the enemy's aircraft carriers. Halsey had no idea that the Japanese had so few aircraft left that the carriers posed no serious threat. Ever since he'd landed on Leyte, Halsey had sent patrols into the air

## Australia

participated in the liberation of the Philippines, primarily with naval units. Mexico contributed a fighter squadron called the Aztec Eagles.

daily, but with no results. At 05.00 on 25th October, the admiral was finally informed that several enemy ships had been located north of the Philippines.

In his eagerness to strike a death blow, Halsey immediately sailed north with 35 ships. The defence of the San Bernardino Strait was left to six small escort carrier ships and six destroyers. Halsey knew that Kurita had sailed away from the Philippines the previous day

and so did not attach any strategic importance to the Strait.

But Kurita had reversed course under cover of darkness. At 07.30, the Japanese suddenly appeared in the San Bernardino Strait with four battleships, eight heavy cruisers and at least 10 destroyers. Admiral Halsey's big ships were far away.

"By heaven-sent opportunity, we are dashing to attack enemy carriers", Kurita announced on the radio to Toyoda.

### ADMIRAL WAS CAUGHT BY SURPRISE

For Rear Admiral Clifton Sprague, who'd been left in command of the remaining US ships, the sight of the enemy's much larger fleet was a grim one.

"I didn't think we'd last 15 minutes", he later recalled. "But I thought we might as well give them all we've got before we go down."

Despite scepticism, the sailors rallied to his call. Gunners manned the ships' guns as light from the shells the Japanese had sent up to mock the Americans through the cloud coloured the morning sky. Soon guns rumbled from both sides, but the Japanese's proved stronger. Artillery from their powerful battleships and heavy cruisers tore US vessels to pieces, and soon most of Sprague's warships lay shattered on the water, bobbing about like crushed tin cans.

The rear admiral did, however, have some planes at his disposal. The aircraft attracted Japanese fire and created confusion, so Kurita was not able to take advantage of his numerical superiority. After two hours of struggle, Kurita suddenly withdrew his fleet from the San Bernardino Strait. Sprague was surprised to say the least. The Japanese commander could have sailed past Sprague's beaten fleet and headed for the landing beaches, but the Japanese mistakenly believed that more American ships were hiding in the waters, fearing that Halsey's fleet would block the Strait to the north and trap Kurita inside. Instead of a major Japanese victory, Sprague and his men returned as heroes.

"The history of the United States Navy records no more glorious two hours of resolution, sacrifice, and success", was the assessment of Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz, commander-in-chief of the US Pacific fleet.

In the meantime, Halsey succeeded in sinking the four aircraft carriers that had been used as bait, while

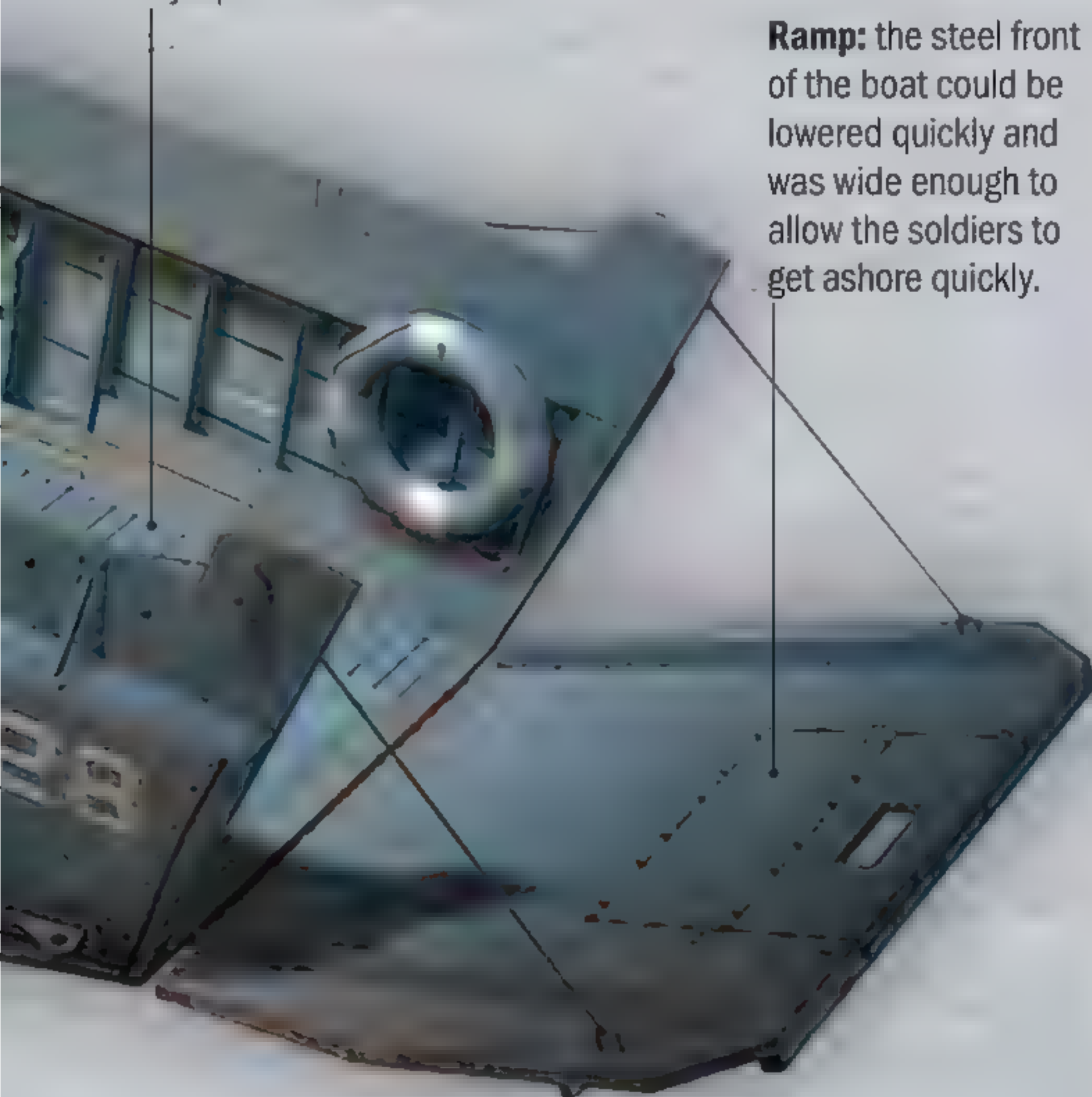
MacArthur added even more decorations to his cap as Field Marshal of the Filipino army.



When soldiers in Higgins boats had created a bridgehead, larger ships could bring supplies ashore.

**Cargo:** each boat could accommodate 36 soldiers or a jeep and 12 soldiers.

**Ramp:** the steel front of the boat could be lowered quickly and was wide enough to allow the soldiers to get ashore quickly.







Although the Japanese suffered the largest casualties, the US also lost many soldiers and seamen. Here the fallen from the aircraft carrier USS Intrepid, known as *The Fighting "I"*, are buried at sea on 26th November, 1944 after history's largest naval battle.

Shoji Nishimura's fleet that was to attack Leyte Bay from the south, was completely destroyed.

In the space of four days, the US had taken complete control of the waters around the Philippines and thus the Pacific as a whole. However, "Bull" Halsey was heavily criticised for leaving Leyte's bridgehead to sail north. Several officers attacked the admiral at a staff dinner with MacArthur on 26th October.

"That's enough!" roared MacArthur and hammered his fist on the table, so plates and cutlery rattled. "Leave the Bull alone! He's still a fighting admiral in my book."

### MACARTHUR TARGETED BY PLANES

The victory in Leyte Bay meant that the US could continue its campaign to expel the Japanese from the Philippines. But even though the landing had been easy, the conquest of Leyte proved anything but. The infantry struggled through the muddy jungle as the heavy October monsoons soaked soldiers'

uniforms so they stuck to the skin. The unforgiving landscape meant there was no real front line, and the US had to fight down

narrow paths where tanks couldn't go. Often bullets suddenly rained from hidden trenches, or the soldiers were ambushed from behind by enemy forces concealed in the dense vegetation.

Even MacArthur couldn't feel safe on Leyte. The general had proclaimed himself the liberator of the Philippines and Japanese high command in Tokyo had a burning desire to see him dead. Thanks to intercepted radio communications, Japanese army chiefs knew that MacArthur had established his headquarters in Tacloban after the city had been liberated. One November, two Zero fighters

swooped down on the so-called Price House, where MacArthur happened to be sitting alone and working at his desk. In the space of a few seconds their bullets smashed through the windows and ripped up the furniture. When the Zero fighters had gone, staff officer Larry Lehrbas rushed into the office.

"Larry", MacArthur said, taking his pipe out to point to the bullet holes 30 centimetres above his head. "Dig those out."

Nevertheless, on Christmas Day 1944 the general was able to finally announce from the same office that "The Leyte-Samar campaign can now be regarded as closed except for minor mopping-up". At the same time, the islands of Samar and Mindoro with their strategic airbases were also under US control.

Douglas MacArthur rubbed his hands – after three years of waiting, it was finally time to invade the main island of Luzon and liberate his beloved Manila.

### MacArthur

held the rank of Field Marshal of the Philippine Army in addition to his US rank. After 1946, the rank disappeared from the Philippine military and is not in use today.

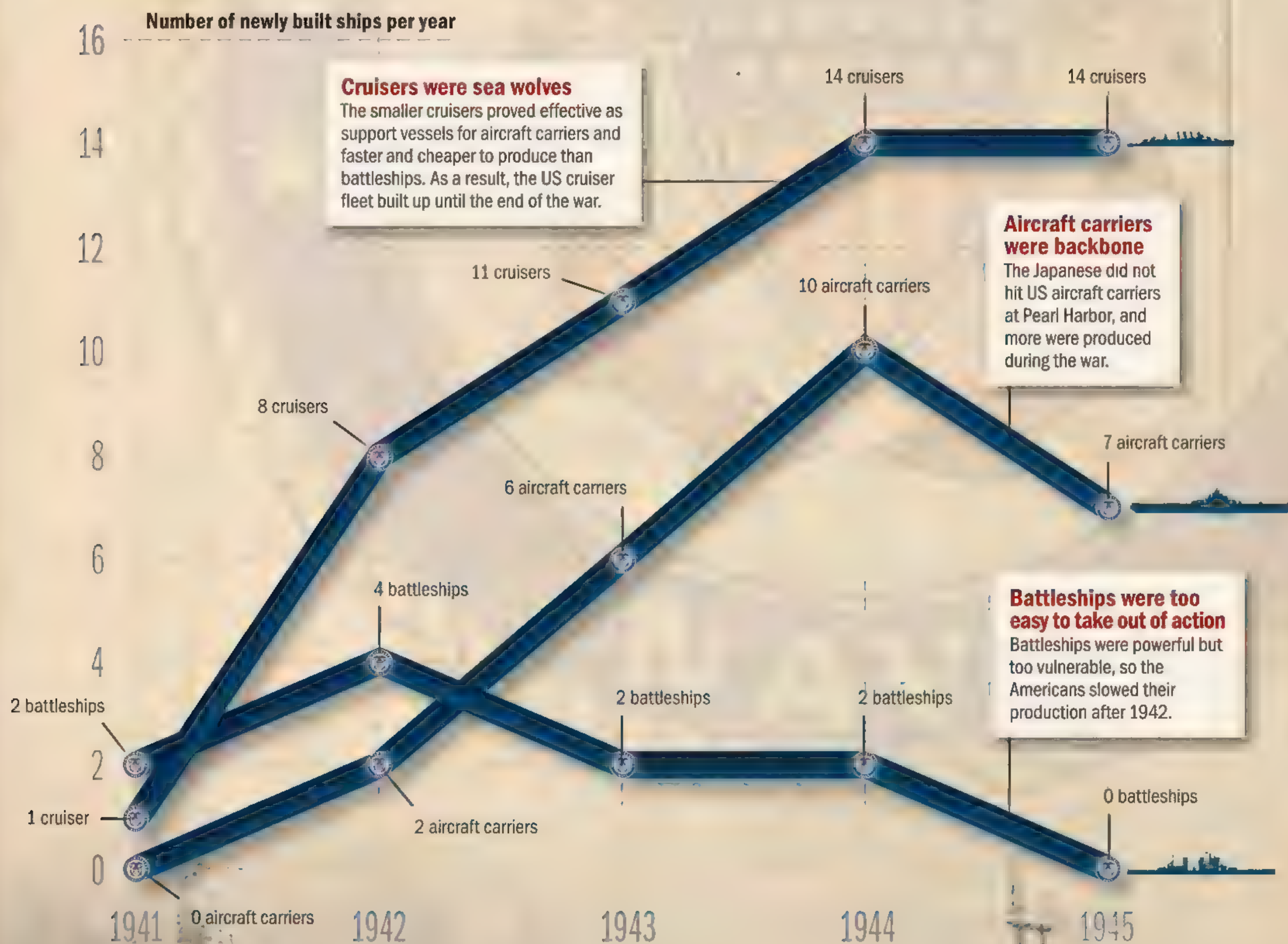


Pilots unwind after a mission. Note the message on the board to target aircraft carriers.




# US Navy was giant of the sea

A well-oiled war production machine meant the US Navy grew to gigantic proportions. Once the industry came up to speed, the Japanese had no chance of keeping up.



Aircraft carriers were deployed in battle groups with smaller ships acting as support vessels.



A black and white photograph showing a large anti-aircraft gun on the deck of the USS Missouri firing at a kamikaze plane. The gun is in the foreground, angled upwards. The plane is in the upper left, leaving a long, dark smoke trail. In the background, the ship's superstructure and other crew members are visible. The scene is set on the ocean.

*Sailors aboard the USS  
Missouri attempt to take down  
a kamikaze plane with anti-  
aircraft guns.*

1944

25<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER





RAMPAZE ATTACKS

# JAPAN'S PILOTS FLY TO THEIR DEATHS

Following a number of crushing defeats by US forces during the autumn of 1944, the Japanese Imperial Navy switches to a new and desperate tactic: ramming and sinking US ships with manned Zero fighters. Thousands volunteer to fly the new suicide missions.



## THE STAGE IS SET



By the end of 1944, Japan's hold over its Pacific empire is disintegrating. US forces edge closer and closer to the mainland. Desperate, the Japanese Imperial Navy sanctions the use of suicide units: young pilots are taught to make their deaths count with targeted crashes into enemy ships.



**L**IEUTENANT YUKIO SEKI HAD BEEN flying his Zero fighter over the sea east of the Philippines for more than three hours. Suddenly, the 23-year-old pilot spotted a fleet of US vessels cutting through the glittering waves beneath him. From an altitude of 6,000 metres, the battleships, cruisers and escort ships looked like innocent toys, but Seki, along with the 23 other pilots in the Japanese formation, knew the vessels would spit hellfire and destruction as soon as the fighters approached.

It was 25th October, 1944 and Seki was in command of a group of volunteers tasked with a very special mission. With a white headband under his helmet and goggles over his eyes, he prepared himself for the last dive – the last action – of his life. He, along with 11 other pilots in the formation, was about to carry out the country's first official kamikaze attack. The remaining 12

planes were ordered to confuse the enemy and defend the Zero fighters, each of which carried a 250-kilogram bomb.

Seki's thoughts drifted back to the days leading up to the attack. As a warrior he knew his duty was to die for the emperor, but the knowledge didn't lessen the pain of being forced to leave behind his new bride, Mariko.

At 10.50, Seki dived towards the blue expanse, levelling up 30 metres above the water's surface. He was two kilometres from his target. Maintaining a low altitude and travelling at 500 kilometres per hour, Seki raced towards his goal: the escort carrier *USS St Lo*. In less than 15 seconds he would die.

## JAPAN RETHINKS ITS STRATEGY

1944 was a terrible year for Japan. Time after time, US forces defeated Imperial troops until even the most stubborn officers





had to admit that peace would never be achieved on Japanese terms unless something drastic happened. The loss of the Mariana chain of islands and the heavy damage sustained by the Imperial Navy during its attempts to defend the archipelago finally persuaded Japan's admirals to consider a new strategy: suicide attacks.

Vice Admiral Takijiro Onishi, widely considered the Father of the Kamikaze, was opposed to the notion initially, but changed his mind after transferring to the front line in 1944 where he learned that half of his new pilots were killed in each sortie without causing any significant enemy losses in return. Japan's inferior aircraft and inexperienced crews didn't stand a chance against the superior forces of the US Navy. But if Imperial pilots must die, then why not let them go down in a blaze of glory, by ramming US vessels and taking the enemy with them?

"These young men with their limited training, outdated equipment and numerical inferiority are doomed by conventional fighting methods. It is important", Onishi claimed, "that death be not in vain. I believe, therefore, that a broad perspective indicates the wisdom of crash-dive [kamikaze] tactics."

This was the Imperial Navy's argument for forming the Special Attack Units, as the kamikaze squadrons were known.

Although suicide missions may seem like an alien tactic to western minds, many Japanese accepted them quite readily. Suicide had always been a part of the nation's military



A white bandanna was worn by kamikaze pilots during their suicide missions.

tradition, and there was deemed to be no greater honour than to die for one's emperor and one's country.

Even the name *kamikaze*, which means divine wind in Japanese, helped persuade volunteers to sign up. The term was first used to describe a violent storm that had destroyed an invading Mongolian-Chinese fleet in 1281. The Japanese believed the tempest was the work of gods and in October 1944, Onishi decided it was time, once again, to summon a divine wind that could sink the enemy navy and save the empire.

On 20th October, the US landed more than 100,000 troops on the Philippine island of Leyte and a task force of 600 US Navy vessels was stationed in the waters around the archipelago, one of the most strategically important areas of Japan's empire.

On the same day, Seki was asked to report to a meeting at Mabalacat Airfield where he was stationed. When he arrived the deputy air wing commander, Colonel Asaichi Tamai and Onishi's chief-of-staff, Captain Rikihei Inoguchi, were



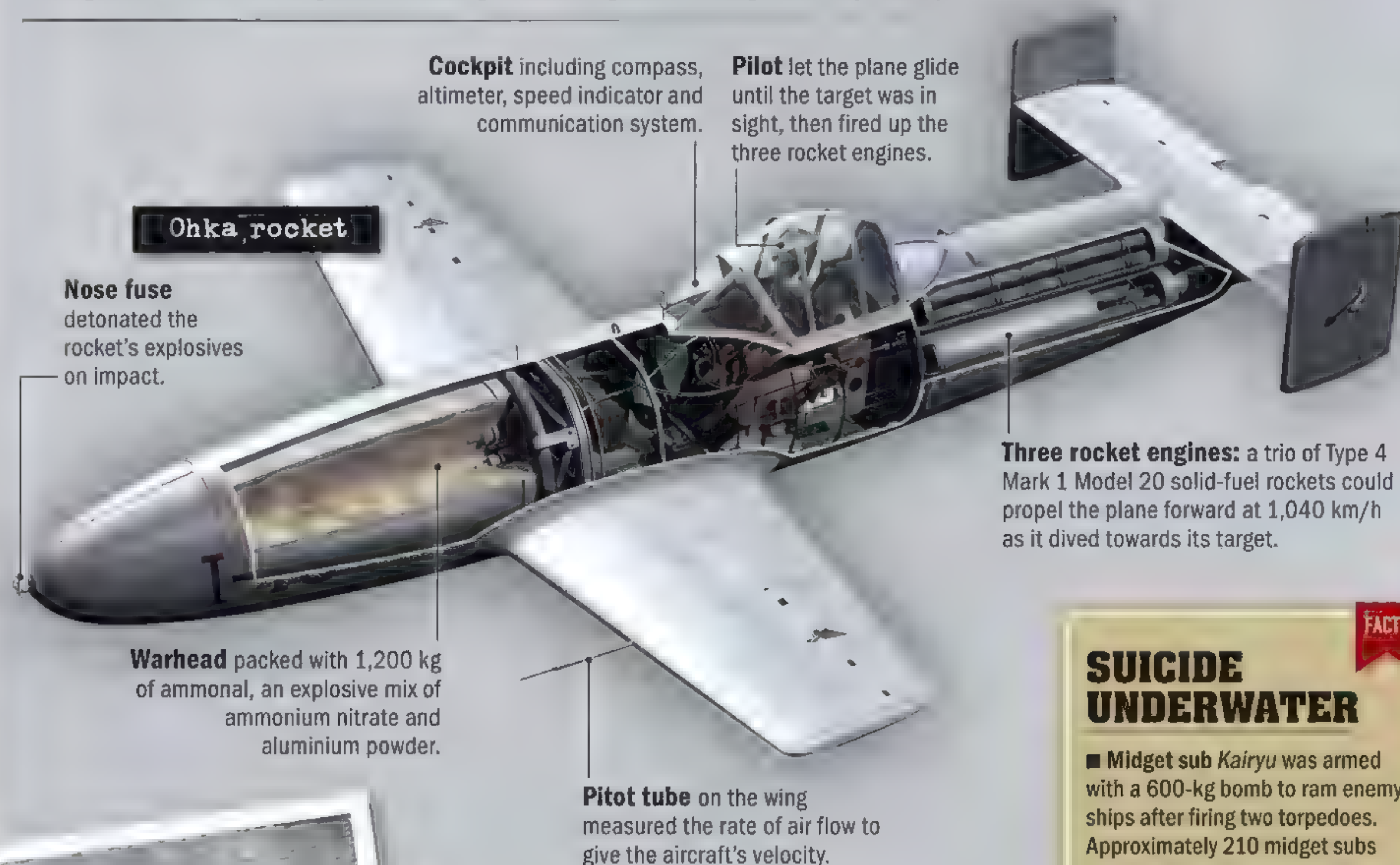
Not all kamikaze pilots were this happy before their last action. Many expressed fear.



## WEAPON

# Rocket plane attacked at 1,000 kilometres per hour

The Ohka was the most advanced aircraft used for kamikaze attacks. The plane's rocket engines could produce speeds of up to 1,040 km/h.



## SUICIDE UNDERWATER

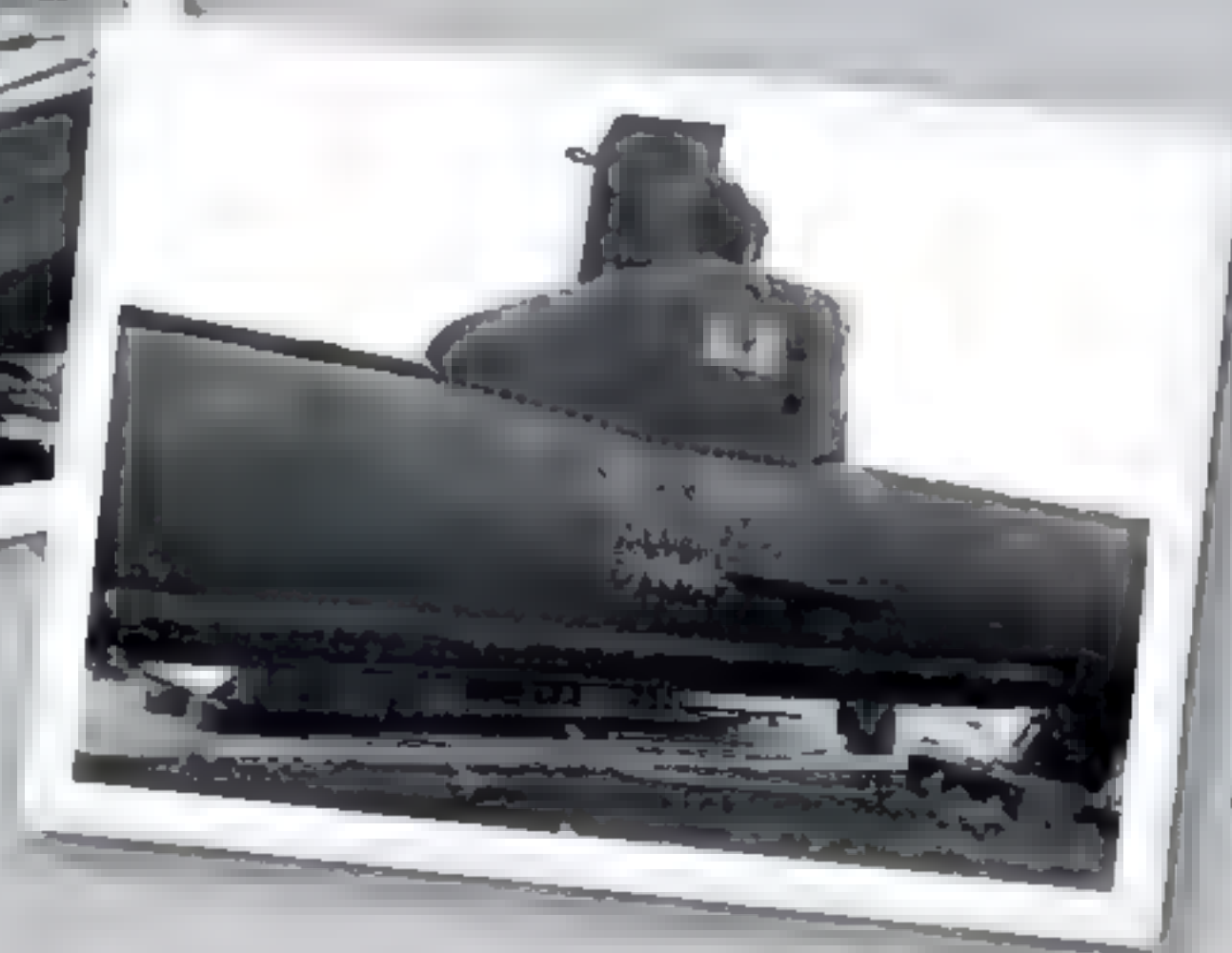
■ Midget sub *Kairyu* was armed with a 600-kg bomb to ram enemy ships after firing two torpedoes. Approximately 210 midget subs were built, but none saw action.

■ Divers were trained to trigger 15-kg mines planted on the hulls of Allied ships. They wore a suit with lead boots and had a liquid food and air purification system along with oxygen tanks. They were able to walk on the sea bed at a depth of 5-7 metres for up to 10 hours.

■ Speed boat bombers were first used in 1945 and crashed into enemy ships at almost 60 km/h.



Kamikaze speed boats could travel at almost 60 km/h.



The *Kairyu* midget submarine had a two-man crew.

waiting for him. With tears in his eyes, Tamai explained that the vice admiral was planning a suicide attack on the US task force and that Seki was being considered as the mission's leader.

Concealing his true feelings, the 23-year-old was silent for a full five seconds before replying, "Yes, I will take on the job." In reality, as an officer of the Imperial Navy who had been singled out for the task, he felt obliged to agree.

It is one of the great ironies of history that Japan's first kamikaze pilot had no desire to die for his country. As a veteran flyer, he believed he was worth more to his country alive than dead: "Japan's future is bleak if it is forced to kill one of its best pilots", he told war correspondent, Masashi Onoda, before

adding, "I am not going on this mission for the emperor or for the empire. I am going because I was ordered to."

The following day, the lieutenant climbed into the cockpit of his Zero for what he assumed would be his last flight, but unable to locate the enemy fleet, Seki and the rest of the formation were forced to return to base. The bitter-sweet pattern of resignation and reprieve repeated itself for the next three days, but then on the fourth day the enemy was sighted.

### SEKI SINKS THE ST. LO

At 10.51 on 25th October, 1944, Seki finally found his target. Pushing the control stick forward, he hurtled from the sky



and swooped towards *St Lo's* stern. The crew of the escort carrier spotted the danger and scrambled to man the rear anti-aircraft gun, blasting away at the incoming plane. Nothing hit the Zero fighter, though, and it sped on, calmly, deliberately and dead on course until, to the sailors' amazement, it cleared the stern at a height of 20 metres and dropped its bomb in the centre of the flight deck. The 250-kilogram bomb pierced the upper deck and exploded on the port side of the hangar deck below. A sea of flames gushed through the hole and engulfed the flight deck. Seki's plane exploded and the pilot, along with the smoking fragments of his plane disappeared over the bow and into the water below. Aboard the *St Lo*, a chain reaction of violent secondary explosions ripped through the hangar deck where planes were waiting to be refuelled and re-armed. When the armament dump exploded, Captain Francis McKenna was forced to accept that the ship could no longer be saved.

The order to abandon ship screeched out over the crackling speakers as survivors attempted to drag the wounded from the smoke-filled engine room and hangar deck to the relative safety of the flight deck. By 11.25, the bow was under water and a few moments later the rest of the eight-tonne ship followed. 113 lives were lost.

A second ship was damaged to a lesser degree in the same kamikaze attack, but for Onishi and his colleagues, there was no doubt about the success of the mission, the result of which was quickly conveyed to Emperor Hirohito. Shocked and filled with grief, the emperor asked a plaintive question: "Was it necessary to go to this extreme?" Then he collected himself, and declaimed that the pilots had "done a great job".

### JAPANESE INFECTED WITH KAMIKAZE FEVER

More successful kamikaze attacks were mounted in the weeks that followed and newspapers eagerly reported the exploits of heroic pilots who, day after day, sank more enemy ships. The numbers were exaggerated in order to help maintain the nation's fighting spirit, but there was no doubt that the new Special Attack Units were inflicting more damage than conventional forces had managed earlier in the year. In the final months of 1944, kamikaze attacks had sunk or damaged almost 100 US vessels.

Increasing numbers of existing pilots, along with raw and young recruits, volunteered to join the suicide units. To the surprise of senior officers, many of the volunteers came from universities.

Flying Petty Officer First Class Isao Masuo summed up the zeal of many of those signing up: "I have been given a splendid opportunity to die", the 23-year-old wrote in a farewell letter to his parents. "I shall be a shield for His Majesty and die cleanly along with my squadron leader and other friends. I wish I could be born seven times, each time to smite the enemy."

Even admirals were not immune to the euphoria gripping the nation. After



**TAKIJIRO ONISHI**

NAME

TITLE | VICE ADMIRAL

### War opponent took a leading role

Takijiro Onishi originally opposed the idea of war with the US, believing that the only outcome of any such hostilities would be unconditional surrender for Japan. Onishi's resistance didn't prevent him from playing a central role in formulating the attack on Pearl Harbor, though. Even when Japan's campaign took a disastrous turn, Onishi remained in charge: in 1944 he sanctioned the use of suicide tactics and is now remembered as the Father of the Kamikaze.

➤ Appointed vice admiral in 1943.

➤ Committed suicide in August 1945.



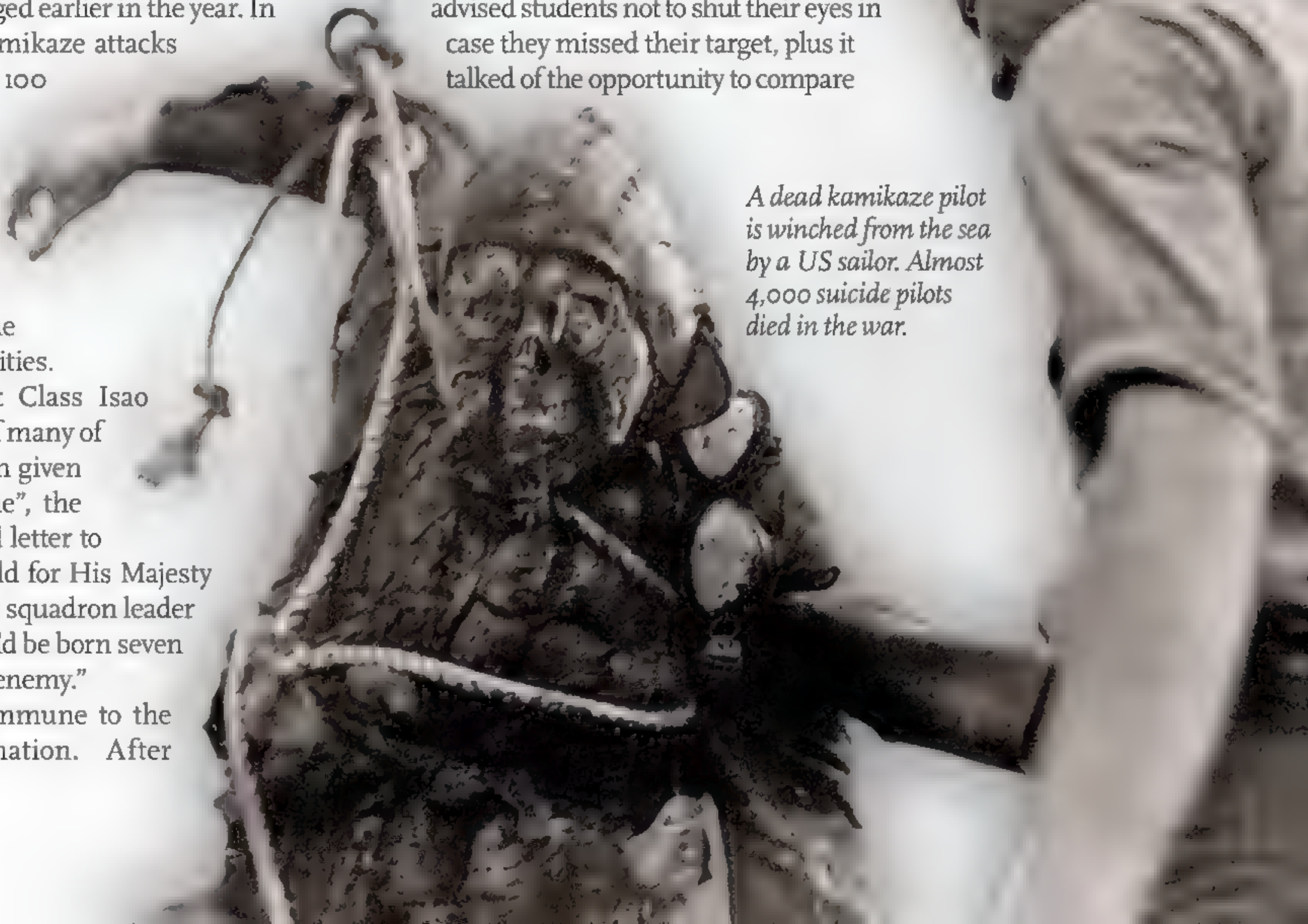
1891-1945

witnessing the "exalted spirit" of the kamikaze pilots under his command, Admiral Matome Ugaki noted in his diary that "Not even an enemy that is a million strong, or has a thousand aircraft carriers, needs to be feared."

Initially, the pilots' training lasted several weeks, though this was shortened to just one week by the end of the war. Corporal punishment was a favoured teaching method as the recruits were dragged through the basics of flying in formation and the various methods of attack. Students were given a suicide manual which explained many things, including where a pilot needed to crash his plane: "when diving and crashing onto a ship, aim for a point between the bridge tower and the smoke stack... [whereas] in the case of an aircraft carrier, aim for the lifts".

The guide didn't restrict itself to purely practical matters, though. When discussing what a pilot should do moments before impact, the manual advised students not to shut their eyes in case they missed their target, plus it talked of the opportunity to compare

*A dead kamikaze pilot is winched from the sea by a US sailor. Almost 4,000 suicide pilots died in the war.*





experiences with other pilots in the afterlife. "Many have crashed... with wide-open eyes. They will tell you what fun they had".

However, the reality was very different when kamikaze pilots woke up on the day they were due to die. While their farewell letters gave the impression that they were eager to embrace a glorious death, most men shook violently as they gulped down the ceremonial sake with which their leaders toasted them.

"When I had first volunteered...

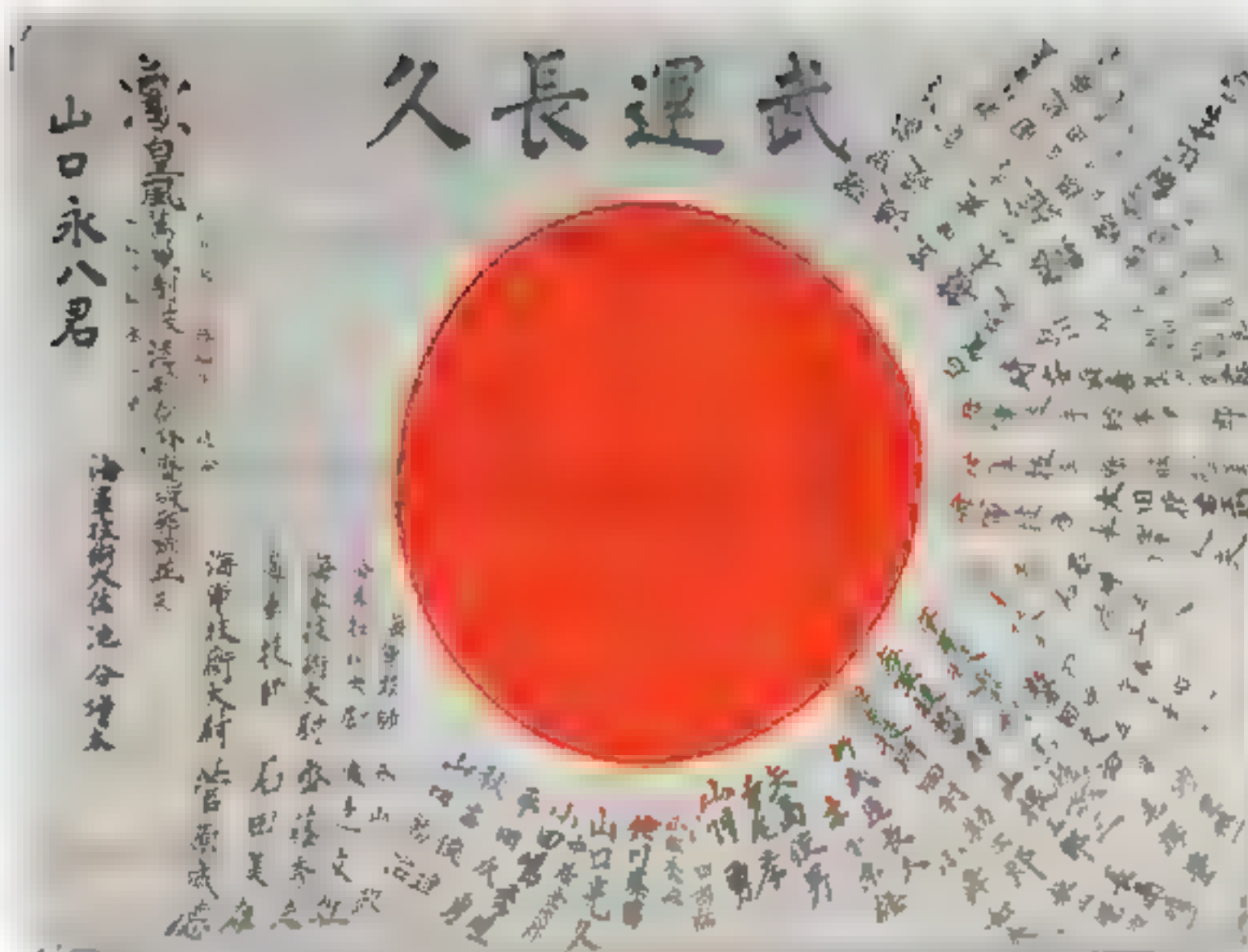
I did not seriously contemplate my own mortality", admitted Flight Petty Officer Second Class Kanji Suzuki, one of the few kamikaze pilots to survive the war. "However, as the standby period dragged on, I became increasingly anxious and depressed. Only death awaited... and there was no turning back."

The Japanese volunteers weren't the only ones struggling to overcome their fear, though: US Navy personnel were also increasingly anxious.

#### US NERVES AT BREAKING POINT

According to Bill Simmons, a US sailor who witnessed Seki's attack, American personnel were stunned by the new Japanese tactic: "We thought we had the war won, and then when they began their kamikaze attacks, it just scared the living daylights out of everybody."

For most US sailors, the war was all about surviving long



*Flags filled with messages from family and friends were given to soldiers on their way to war. The flags were supposed to protect the soldiers and bring them luck.*

enough to return to their family home, and it was a shock to discover that the enemy did not share their values. The Japanese pilots' calm acceptance of suicide tactics turned many US sailors into nervous wrecks with some breaking down altogether when the deadly enemy squadrons appeared in the sky. Some gun crews even panicked and shot down their own planes as they returned to the carrier.

As the commander of US Third Fleet, Admiral William Halsey, pointed out in the immediate aftermath of the attack on 25th October, "The psychology behind [kamikaze attacks] was too alien to us. Americans who fight to live, find it hard to realise that another people will fight to die."

The pressure was particularly intense from April to June 1945 at the battle of Okinawa, when kamikaze missions reached their peak. But while the Special Attack Units made a large impact on the American psyche, their strike rate in the final 10 months of the war was just 16 percent. That is, only 16 out of 100 kamikaze planes managed to reach and hit Allied ships. Even those pilots that did manage to crash into their target, didn't always succeed in crippling or sinking it.

#### FATHER OF THE KAMIKAZE TAKES HIS OWN LIFE

Despite the sacrifice of thousands of young men, Japan's new divine wind could not sink the navy that now threatened its empire. After the fighting at Okinawa, Japan began to run out of planes and the rate of kamikaze attacks declined with relatively few suicide missions carried out in the period leading up to Japan's surrender in August 1945.

The capitulation was too great a shame for the proud Onishi who, after listening to the emperor's broadcast to the Japanese



*Pilot training became shorter during the war — by the end, it lasted just one week.*



people, entered his office and wrote a farewell letter to his wife, exactly as all his married kamikaze pilots had done before him. In the suicide letter, the vice admiral apologised for sending so many young Japanese to their deaths. Then, with the lives of almost 4,000 crew members on his conscience, Onishi unsheathed a borrowed sword and plunged it into his stomach. It was time for the Father of the Kamikaze to die.

Ugaki, the admiral who believed no enemy could defeat the spirit of the kamikaze, was equally determined to die rather than live with the shame of Japan's surrender. As soon as the emperor's speech finished, he squeezed in to a twin-seat

Suisei dive bomber, forcing his two subordinates to share a single seat, then took off. He was about to fly the final kamikaze mission of the war.

At 19.24 on 15th August, the plane radioed in that it was preparing to dive towards a US target. What happened next is unclear, but Ugaki's aircraft crashed into the sea, possibly after coming under fire from anti-aircraft guns.

The next morning, US soldiers found Ugaki's body washed up on an island. They dug a grave in the white sand and respectfully buried the vice admiral's remains: the war's last kamikaze pilot had been laid to rest at last.

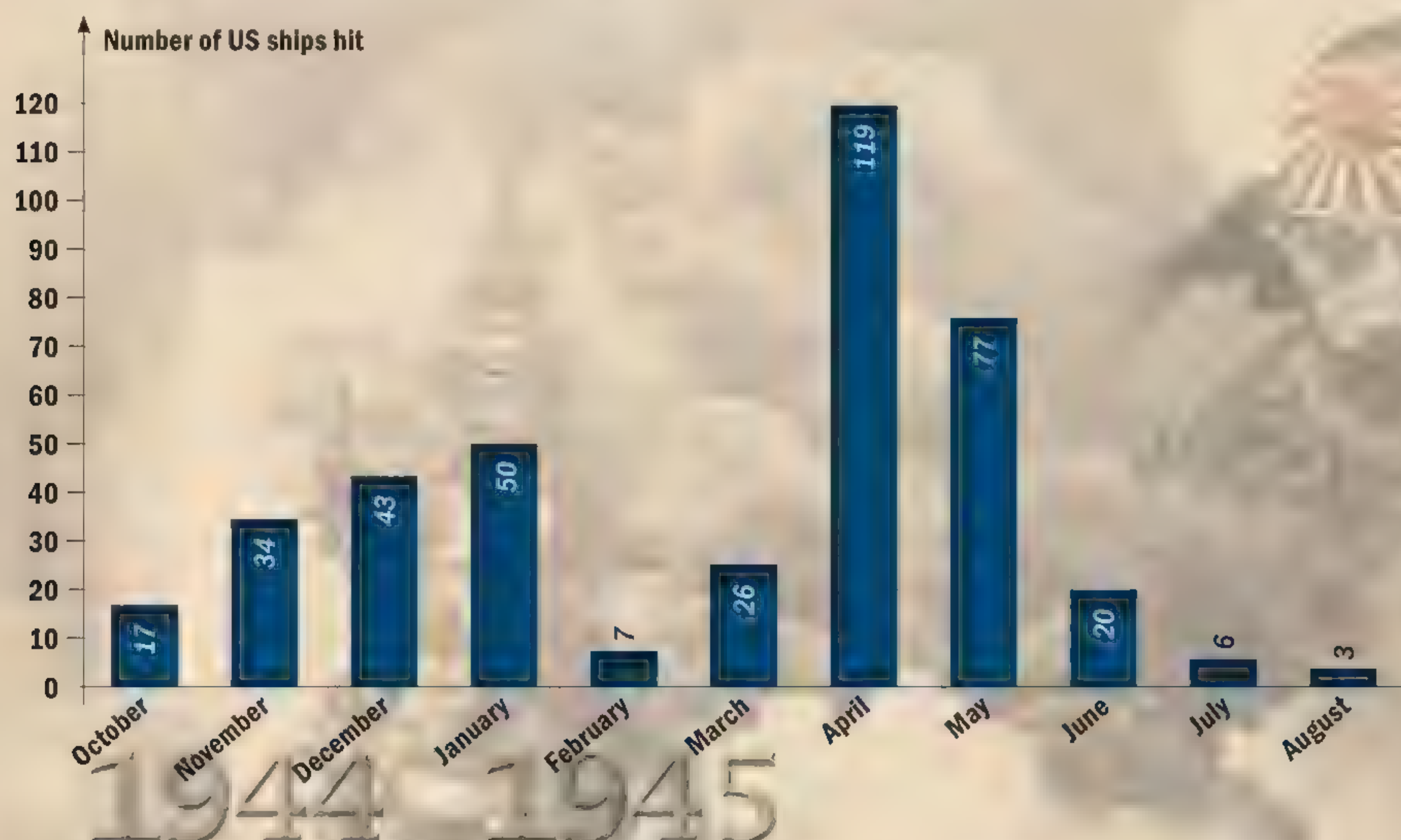
## PERSPECTIVE

# One in four ships hit

Japan's kamikaze attacks reached their peak during the battle of Okinawa. Almost three thousand suicide planes were used during the three-month defence of the island and almost a quarter of US Navy vessels were hit by kamikaze strikes.

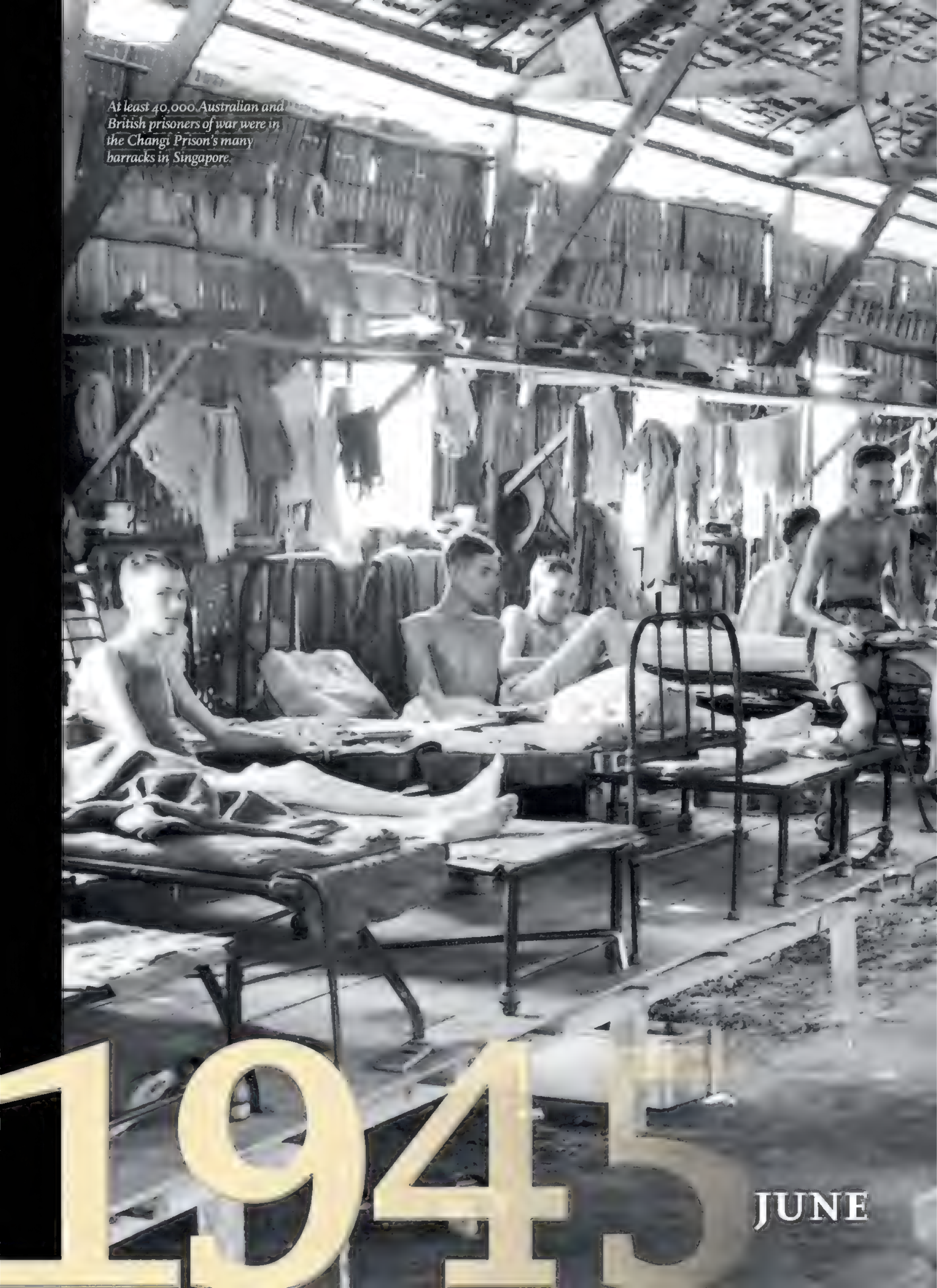
In spring 1945, Okinawa was the last obstacle to Allied forces during their advance on Japan's mainland. During the battle for the island, the Japanese Imperial Navy unleashed the full force of its suicide squadrons, sending 2,944 kamikaze planes into the air. A US survey showed that 16 of their ships sank and 185 were

damaged, which amounted to almost a quarter of the task force's vessels. One US war correspondent claimed that at times, it seemed as if the entire sea was in flames. The Battle of Okinawa left 12,000 US dead and 36,000 injured. Approximately one third of those losses were attributed to kamikaze attacks.



The aircraft carrier USS Bunker Hill was hit by two kamikazes at Okinawa in May 1945.





At least 40,000 Australian and British prisoners of war were in the Changi Prison's many barracks in Singapore.

1945

JUNE

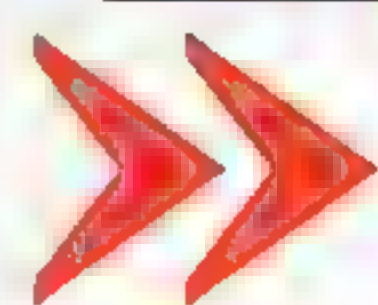


# CAPTIVE IN HELL

In the summer of 1945, the American officer and former Olympic runner Louis Zamperini is buckling after two years in Japanese captivity. Like several thousand other Allied prisoners of war, the American lives with forced labour, punishment and the ever-present fear of execution and medical trials.



## THE STAGE IS SET



As Japan's Pacific empire has grown, thousands of prisoners of war find themselves behind barbed wire in countless camps throughout the Far East. As Allied soldiers in German captivity return home to freedom in Europe, their comrades in Asia are still waiting for Japan's surrender in August 1945.



**I**T WAS AN EVENING IN JUNE 1945 when the guards pushed US officer Louis Zamperini and the rest of the work squad into the yard. Zamperini knew a hard punishment awaited some of the prisoners. For two years, the 28-year-old bombardier and former Olympic distance runner had been imprisoned in various Japanese camps, and had already been humiliated repeatedly at the Naoetsu Camp, where prisoners were punished for violating the rules.

This time, a couple of hungry prisoners had stolen fish from the galley on a barge in the harbour, where Zamperini's team shovelled coal and salt every day in the summer heat. But the camp's sadistic sergeant, Mutsuhiro Watanabe, had no intention of merely punishing the wrongdoers. He drew Zamperini and five other officers out of the row so they stood with the thieves in front of the other rank-and-file prisoners.

Watanabe, dubbed "The Bird" by the prisoners, believed that the officers were responsible for the behaviour of the thieves and so also deserved punishment. But tonight it would not be the guard's fists and kendo sticks that would do the job. Every single prisoner of the 100 or so standing in the yard would have to step forward to hammer into the officers and thieves with



*Only the luckiest soldiers had their field canteens with them in camp.*

their fists. If they didn't strike with maximum force the punch would have to be repeated until Watanabe was satisfied. "Sorry, sir", whispered some of the prisoners before they reluctantly punched their comrades' jaws.

Zamperini was still standing after the first blow, but the pain and taste of blood came quickly. Soon his legs began to buckle, and the American plunged into the gravel. A couple of times he struggled back up, but immediately fell back down after more heavy strikes.

"Next! Next! Next!" The Bird screamed as he ordered more prisoners to hit the semi-conscious Zamperini, so that they were forced to strike him while he laid on the ground.

For two hours, the blows rained over the American, and it wasn't until after the sun had gone down that two fellow prisoners were finally allowed to help "Louie" into the barracks. His head resembled a crimson balloon, and his jaw was so swollen the officer couldn't open his mouth for the next few days.

"I wanted to live and I hoped I'd live, but... I believed my date and death was set", Zamperini wrote in his secret diary. "Each morning I'd wake up and think, Is this the day? Where will they put my bones? What could I do?"

Only a quick Japanese surrender would save Zamperini and his fellow prisoners.

### PRISON CAMPS SPREAD THROUGH THE EMPIRE

Naoetsu camp – situated on the west coast of the main island of Honshu in Japan – was just one of at least 624 well-known prison camps dotted around the Japanese Empire. As the Imperial Army captured new possessions in China and South-east Asia, its troops diligently knocked bamboo poles into the ground and built barbed-wire camps for their prisoners of war. Barracks, temples and other existing buildings were also transformed into large prisons.

Prison camps shot up everywhere – in Burma, Thailand, Singapore, Malaya and the Philippines as well as on the Indonesian islands. Forced labour became a major part of prisoners' everyday life. They built roads, railways and airbases while also loading and unloading military equipment onto ships.

Just as many camps were established in the mother country. In Japan and Formosa (modern-day Taiwan), people were needed to work in the copper and zinc mines. With many local



**Louis Zamperini**

*Louis Zamperini's star status as a former Olympic runner was exploited in US Army propaganda.*





About 60,000 Allied prisoners of war were forced to build a railroad from Thailand to Burma.

## “You have no rights. International Law and the Geneva Convention are dead”

Japanese Indonesian camp commander to Allied prisoners of war

men away at war, factories lacked manpower. For this reason, the Japanese transported many of their POWs from South-east Asia to the north on so-called “hell ships”, due to the miserable conditions on board. The men were crammed together just like the slave ships of the 1700s, and there was no care for the sick. During the two-week boat trip, prisoners received little in the way of food or water, and many were dead on arrival.

Louis Zamperini, who in May 1943 survived when his bomber crashed, was also transported to Japan after first being detained on the Marshall Islands. In Japan, he spent 18 months in the camps of Ofuna and Omori near Tokyo before being sent to Naoetsu on the west coast.

Japan's own climate was very different to the tropics of the empire, where the heat and the continuous rain made every day a hardship. The summer heat also plagued prisoners in Japan, but they also suffered from cold. When Zamperini arrived on 2nd March 1945 – three months before his beating in the yard – there were snow drifts as high as four metres on either side of the road as he travelled towards the gate of camp 4B in the small town of Naoetsu. The American was led into the camp's barrack, which was a large building over two floors, where about 300 prisoners were crammed together.

After years of captivity, they were all as emaciated as Zamperini. Despite the frost, they were dressed in the same tattered tropical khaki uniforms they'd worn when captured. The Japanese did not give them any warm clothes. An icy wind from

the sea blew in through the cracks of the building, and the snow fell through the holes in the building's tin roof. Throughout the sleeping area, floorboards were pulled up and burned in the prisoners' attempt to survive the cold winter nights.

Zamperini's first nights went almost without sleep. The officer just lay and shook and prayed that he survived until the next morning in the deadly cold. In the three



NAME

**MUTSUHIRO WATANABE**

TITLE

SERGEANT, PRISON GUARD

### The Bird avoided punishment

Mutsuhiro “Bird” Watanabe fled before the Naoetsu camp was freed by American forces, and appeared on a list of Japan's 40 worst war criminals. However, Watanabe managed to stay hidden on a farm where he worked for free. Only when all Japanese war criminals received amnesty in 1958 did The Bird appear from his hiding place. As a result, the former guard avoided being executed for his crimes during the war.

- Became a wealthy insurance salesman.
- Refused to meet Louis Zamperini in 1998.



1918-2003



# Cold troubled prisoners

Blistering heat was a major problem for prisoners in many Japanese camps, but in Naoetsu on the Japanese main island Honshu, below-zero temperatures were a living hell in the unheated barracks.

## A Gatehouse

A gatehouse provided the guards with shelter, but also housed small jail cells.

## B Prisoner barracks

A two-storey wooden building about 15 x 40 metres served as the prisoners' barracks. Each floor had sleeping rooms with space for between 20 and 40 prisoners. Holes in the barracks' tin roof and wooden walls made the winter nights unbearably cold. The beds were planks nailed to the wall, and the mattresses consisted of loose rice straw.

## C Wood fence and barbed wire

A fence of wooden palisades and barbed wire prevented prisoners from escaping from the camp.

## D Kitchen and warehouse

The small and sparse rations, supervised by the Japanese, were prepared in the kitchen by the prisoners themselves and then carried in buckets to the barracks.

## E Parade and punishment

Every morning the prisoners gathered at the parade square before being sent for forced labour, which might be at the steelworks, the harbour or in the fields. The labour force was also involved in the production of weapons for the Japanese.

During the morning roll call, the guards handed out severe punishments, so that all prisoners could clearly see the consequences of breaking the camp's set of rules.

## F The Infirmary

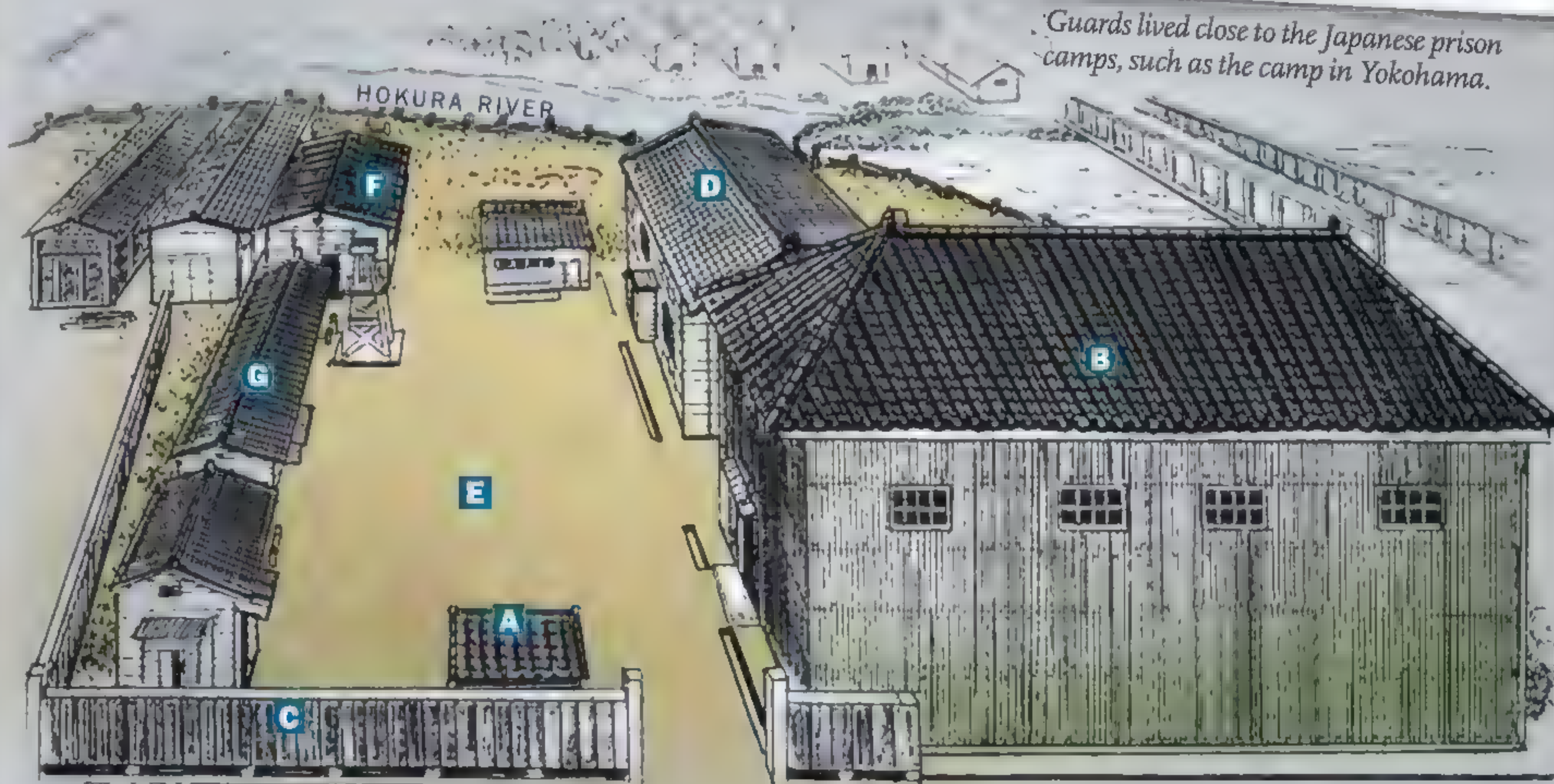
It was only completed in 1945 and was never operational. Medical treatment in the camp was practically non-existent.

## G Japanese barracks

The guards lived in a nearby barracks, and were fed a varied and plentiful diet. They were also supplied with cigarettes seized from the Red Cross packages.



Guards lived close to the Japanese prison camps, such as the camp in Yokohama.



previous camps, the American had been injected with unknown fluids into his veins during medical trials; he'd also been beaten with clubs, and had been forced to stand in the classical Japanese penal position with bent knees and arms stretched out for hours. But of the many hells he had experienced in the prison camps, Naoetsu became the worst.

## PRISONERS LIVED IN A BACTERIAL HELL

Wretched conditions were common in all Japanese prison camps. The toilets were usually only holes in the ground,

which were so close to the barracks that the stench attracted rats in their thousands. The prisoners were often woken as rodents crawled over their heads and nipped at their feet. Worse still, the rats bit through the mosquito nets, allowing the malaria-carrying mosquitos to bite the men. The appalling lack of sanitation turned the camps into bacterial bombs. The Japanese made no efforts to improve conditions, and revulsion against their captors grew among the prisoners.

"These days, in which I see men being progressively broken into emaciated, pitiful wrecks, bloated with beriberi, terribly



reduced with pellagra, dysentery and malaria and covered with disgusting sores, a searing hate arises in me whenever I see a Nip. Disgusting, deplorable, hateful troop of men – apes”, said an Australian military doctor who became well-acquainted with several camps in Asia over a period of three and a half years. According to the Geneva Convention, the Japanese were obliged to provide care for the sick and wounded, but prison commandants ignored it. The sick were often forced to work even with a 40-degree fever, and the guards ignored any complaints.

“Remember your status as prisoners of war. You have no rights. International Law and the Geneva Convention are dead”, stated the commandment of an Indonesian prison camp. A letter from Prime Minister Hideki Tojo to all prison camps made it clear that the empire had its “own ideology concerning prisoners of war, which would naturally make their treatment more or less different from that in Europe and America”.

The low priority of medical care was evident in the camp infirmaries, which rarely had mattresses, sheets, pillows or blankets, and where the cupboards were almost bare. Medicine and medical equipment were sent to the Japanese army, and prisoners with medical backgrounds could do almost nothing to treat their fellow soldiers.

One doctor compared conditions to the slums of Newcastle and North Shields – and his Thai camp came off worse: there were no bedpans or washbasins, and those suffering from dysentery would be left for hours in their soiled clothes. “The stench is awful, and their situation is heart-breaking”, he wrote.

Only those prisoners seriously ill or injured were exempted from work, but they also feared that – according to Tojo’s instructions – the guards would not allow prisoners to “lie idle, doing nothing but enjoy free meals, for even a single day”. Therefore, any extended sick leave provided the guards with an excuse to cut the already sparse supplies. Zamperini found this to be particularly true in Naoetsu.

## GUARD SMASHED KNEES

Some weeks after Zamperini’s arrival, the snow melted in Naoetsu. Every morning the prisoners gathered in the courtyard before The Bird set groups to different tasks – either at a chemical plant, steel mill, port or working on the land. As an officer, the Geneva Convention should have allowed Zamperini to avoid forced labour, but instead he spent spring working at the dockyards. Here he either shovelled coal and salt on the barges, or loaded the packed bags on to waiting freight trains. At least he could now keep warm after his frozen introduction.

In April, however, the trial began again for the American when he made

# “The stench is awful and their situation is heart-breaking”

British doctor about prisoners suffering dysentery in Thai camp

his way up a narrow, steep ramp to a railroad car with a heavy salt basket on his back. A Japanese guard who was on the way down the ramp decided to amuse himself by sticking his elbow out, so that Zamperini lost his balance and fell hard on the asphalt. He felt a lot of pain in both knees and one ankle, as if something had been torn. Unable

to support his leg, he could not join the camp’s labour squads, and the American knew that it would cost him half his already minimal food ration.

Rations had already been severely cut because of Japan’s hardship on the war front, and in Naoetsu, the daily ration consisted solely of a small amount of yellow, smelly drinking water and a few hundred grams of millet or

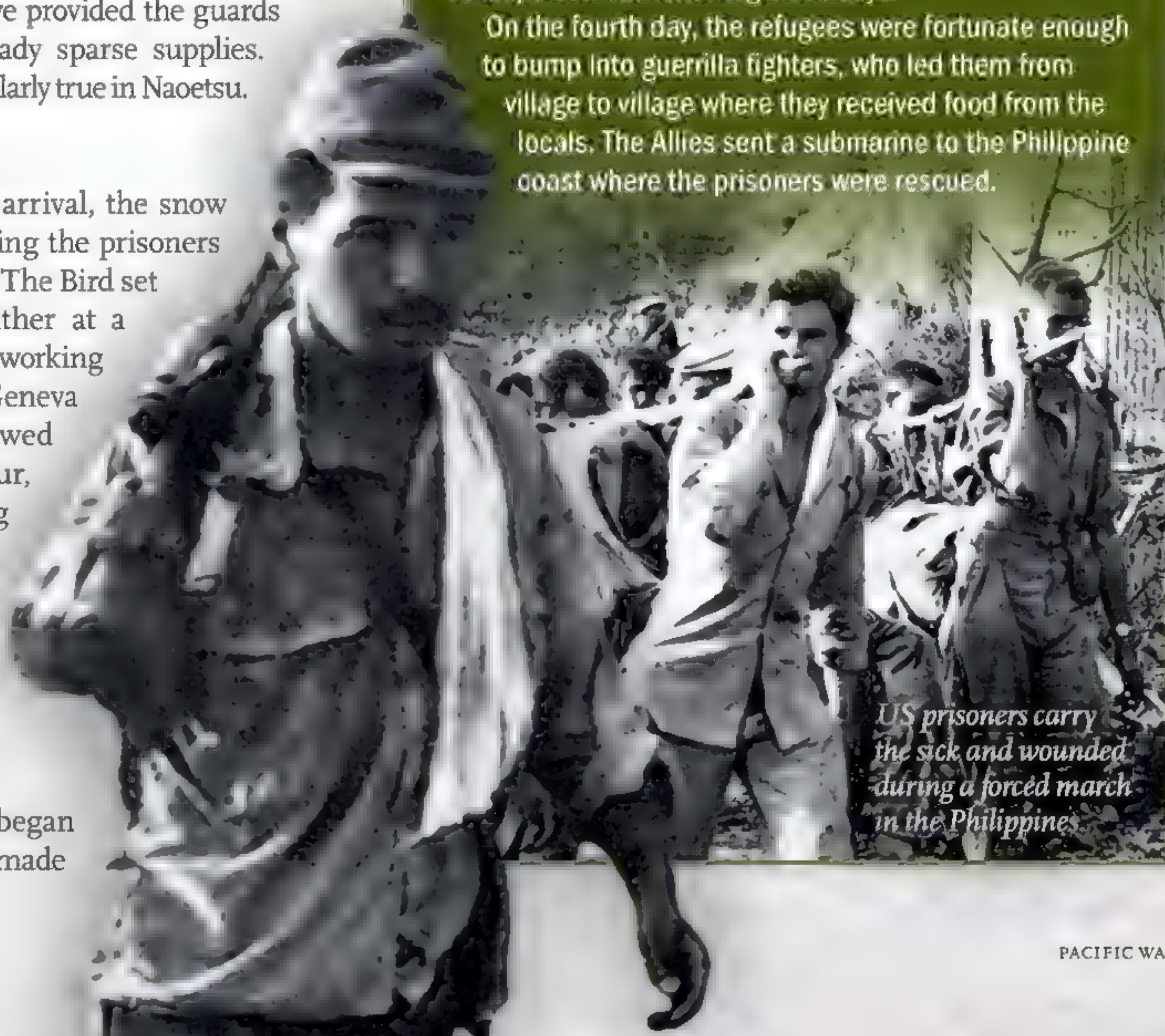
## A miraculous escape

In the spring of 1943, 12 POWs escaped from the Davao Penal Colony. It was one of the few successful group escapes from a Japanese camp.

On 4th April, 1943, a group of prisoners managed to escape from the Davao camp in the Philippines. The Japanese had considered the camp to be one of the empire’s most secure, because it was surrounded by swamps, in which lurked crocodiles and giant wasps.

The guards slackened their control to the point where 10 Americans and two Filipinos were allowed to go outside the camp one day to build a shed they’d volunteered to erect. In fact, it became the starting point of a planned escape, and the men fought through the swamps over the following three days.

On the fourth day, the refugees were fortunate enough to bump into guerrilla fighters, who led them from village to village where they received food from the locals. The Allies sent a submarine to the Philippine coast where the prisoners were rescued.



US prisoners carry the sick and wounded during a forced march in the Philippines



*Many prisoners of war were so ill and malnourished that the Allies dropped food and medical personnel down via parachutes in the largest camps after Japan's surrender.*





福岡俘虜收容所俘虜郵便

IMPERIAL JAPANESE ARMY

5-10-1944.

Darling,  
Once again I am allowed to  
write to you. I am feeling a lot better  
these days as I have received quite a  
number of letters, only wish I could write  
as often.  
Remember me to all,  
All my love to you Darling,

44

*The Japanese – to a limited degree  
– allowed prisoners to send letters  
and postcards to their families.*

barley accompanied by a little  
cooked seaweed. This poor,  
scarce diet distressed  
Zamperini. The American was  
allowed a full ration when The  
Bird set him up to clean the  
camp's pigsty. The guard enjoyed  
watching the prisoner crawling

around collecting pig muck with his bare hands, but  
Zamperini had to accept humiliation as the price for survival.

Generally, it was a combination of illness and too little food  
that cost most lives in the Japanese prison camps. In many  
places, rice was almost the only food, and with only three cups  
(equivalent to 3-400 grams) a day, the prisoners were quickly  
transformed into walking skeletons with little resistance to  
disease. By comparison, US Army soldiers received over  
2,000 grams of varied foodstuffs in their daily ration.

More often than not, prisoners only caught a glimpse of the  
promised vegetables and meat in the porridge-like food, and  
the taste was so foul many couldn't keep the food down. But  
the sparse food was essential, and one Australian doctor  
advised prisoners to keep trying to eat even if they couldn't  
keep it down as some nutrients might enter the body.

The lack of vitamins in the monotonous diet meant that  
almost all prisoners suffered from inflammations and sores.  
Their bodies screamed for protein, and the prisoners threw  
themselves ferociously at all living things. Cats, dogs, rats,  
snakes, bats, lizards, snails, frogs and insects were all  
consumed in the struggle to avoid starvation.

### **VIOLENCE WAS A PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE**

Their desperate need to fill their stomachs had driven  
Zamperini's fellow prisoners to scavenge for fish on the barge  
in June 1945. For Zamperini, who'd only just returned to work  
after his knee injury, it was unfortunate that The Bird had  
chosen to punish the American and five of his fellow officers  
too. But punishing innocent prisoners was part and parcel of  
all guards' behaviour across the empire's prison camps.

Violence was an everyday occurrence, and if the prisoners  
worked too slowly, or failed to salute, the Japanese attacked  
them with batons and bare fists. Other prisoners were forced  
to extend their arms while holding heavy stones or found  
themselves in tiny cells or cages placed in the scorching sun.

The Japanese military police – *Kempeitai* – were particularly  
feared. The officers used torture to extract information from  
the prisoners, especially those who attempted to escape.  
During the interrogations, torturers plunged bamboo

**“I wanted to live...  
but the kind of faith  
I'd had disappeared”**

Officer Louis Zamperini, from his diary in the Naoetsu camp





*Prisoners from a Japanese camp escape to freedom. When the Japanese surrendered, the inmates often took control of camps.*



*The roles were reversed as former prison guards bowed to the freed prisoners after Japan's surrender.*

splinters beneath the nails of the victims, administered electric shocks, dislocated limbs, gave them burns and forced water into their lungs until the prisoners passed out. In many cases, after they were questioned they were subsequently executed with a shot to the head. For the detainees, death became "an accepted part of life", as one Brit put it. Another even learned to see death in positive terms when it meant an end to the horrible everyday life of the camps: "Soldiers died happy, finally freed from their pain and suffering".

#### **PRISONERS PLANNED TO MURDER THE TYRANT**

Although death was a frequent guest in Naoetsu, Zamperini had survived his beating at the hands of his fellow prisoners on The Bird's order. But how much longer he could handle the humiliation and starvation was uncertain. The Japanese had herded even more prisoners into the camp, and in July rations were again reduced to a diet of just seaweed and water.

The only hope for the prisoners was that Japan would

soon surrender. US B-29 aircraft flew regularly over Naoetsu, which the prisoners saw as an indication that the empire was crumbling, but at the same time the men received a worrying message from the local Japanese that all in camp 4B would be killed on 22nd August. In camps elsewhere in Japan, the guards were apparently also preparing to erase all traces.

As the possibility of a massacre loomed, The Bird's sadism became even more erratic. Every single day he humiliated and punished the prisoners, and Zamperini was almost always among the victims: "I drown you tomorrow", was The Bird's threat on one occasion. It all became too much for Zamperini, who decided he would kill his tormentor – the 28-year-old bombardier had no options left and felt he might just as well die in an attempt to kill his executioner.

Just like Zamperini, many other prisoners were conspiring to murder their captors, but before they had a chance The Bird and the majority of his colleagues suddenly disappeared from camp after Japan's surrender on 15th August. It was only five

days later that the prisoners became aware of Japan's capitulation when a US plane passed overhead and signalled that the war was over.

In the middle of the courtyard, Zamperini stood alone, impoverished and feverish, but with the certainty that he would survive. More than two years of imprisonment were over.

**"Soldiers died  
happy, finally freed  
from their...  
suffering"**

*Allied soldier about the death of his fellow inmates*



# One in four POWs died

During the Pacific War, more than 140,000 Allied soldiers ended in the Empire's prison camps. A mortality rate of over 27 percent meant that the risk of perishing during their internment was almost seven times higher than in German camps in Europe.

## Number of deaths per country in Japanese prison camps



### United Kingdom

37,583 prisoners were liberated in 1945. But the British's loss rate was

**12,433**



### Canada

Over 1,700 Canadians were captured by the Japanese. Number of deaths:

**273**



### Netherlands

42,000 Dutchmen were captured on Java. Deaths totalled:

**8,500**



### United States

27,465 Americans were captured by the Japanese. Their deaths numbered:

**12,935**



### Australia

22,000 Australians were captured by the Japanese. Number of deaths:

**7,412**



### New Zealand

100 New Zealanders were captured by the Japanese. Their deaths numbered:

**31**

Crosses with name, rank and date of death marked the graves of 800 prisoners who died in Singapore.



HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI

# ATOM BOMBS END THE WAR

An unimaginable destructive force is released when the United States drops the first nuclear bomb over the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Civilian losses are horrific.

Nevertheless, US command remains firm in its decision to drop a second bomb. The eventual target – Nagasaki – is chosen by chance

1945

6<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST



*The mushroom cloud flung its  
deadly shadow over Hiroshima.  
The explosion was equivalent  
to 16,000 tonnes of TNT.*





## THE STAGE IS SET

➤➤➤ The US finishes its development of the atom bomb in the summer of 1945. The components of two bombs are transported to the island of Tinian, from where Japan can be reached by heavy bombers. The bombs are assembled in August and made ready for use. It's now up to US leaders to decide which cities will be hit.



**T**HE GIANT MUSHROOM CLOUD ROSE OVER HIROSHIMA. The plane *Enola Gay*, which had dropped the world's first atomic weapon, was already 18 kilometres away when the bomb *Little Boy* detonated to trigger the cloud. The gigantic explosion was the result of President Harry S Truman's decision to use the new weapons of mass destruction. Yet just four months previously, America's new president had known nothing about the doomsday weapon.

**EVENING OF 12TH APRIL, THE WHITE HOUSE, WASHINGTON DC** President Truman hears about the work towards a new super bomb for the first time. Truman looked disoriented and exhausted. He'd just been sworn in as president and was preparing to hold his first cabinet meeting.

Members of the government had gathered together. The new president asked them to stay on in their posts and continue their roles. The leadership role was new to Truman. He'd only been vice president for 82 days and hadn't been involved in major decisions made by his predecessor, the late Franklin D Roosevelt.

After Truman had finished his brief inaugural address, Secretary of War Henry L Stimson informed the president about the latest developments in the war against Japan. After the meeting, Stimson asked to speak with Truman in private.

## Silverplate

was the code reference for B-29 bombers rebuilt to carry nuclear weapons. Their weight was reduced to fly at nine kilometres altitude, where Japanese aircraft couldn't follow.

**10.00, 31ST MAY, WASHINGTON DC** President Truman is fully briefed on the nuclear bomb. He has set up a committee to discuss the use of the new weapons of mass destruction.

The atmosphere in the top-secret Interim Committee meeting was tense. The atom bomb was almost ready for testing and could soon be ready for use in the war. Although the Germans had surrendered, the Japanese were still putting up a fanatical resistance.

JR Oppenheimer, scientific head of the Manhattan Project that was developing the bomb, took to the floor. The lean, bird-like

man explained the bomb could generate an explosion equivalent to at least 2,000 tonnes of TNT. If used against a large city, around 20,000 would be killed.

Scientific adviser Ernest Lawrence broke in with a suggestion. What about letting the Japanese attend a demonstration? Perhaps it would persuade them to surrender?

Lawrence's idea was quickly rejected. The committee reached a decision under the lead of Presidential advisor James Byrnes and Stimson, which was subsequently written into the meeting's minutes:

"The bomb should be used against Japan as soon as possible; that it be used on a war plant surrounded by workers' homes; and that it be used without prior warning."

**12TH JUNE, WASHINGTON DC** Lieutenant General Leslie Groves, military chief of the Manhattan Project, holds a meeting with Stimson.

Stimson listened attentively as Groves described in detail his preferred target for the bomb. It must hit a city, he said – one that hadn't yet been



NAME

**JULIUS R OPPENHEIMER**

TITLE

PHYSICIST

## Father of the bomb had misgivings

Although JR Oppenheimer had built the atom bomb, he became a strong opponent of the weapon after the war. He refused to assist in the development of the more powerful hydrogen bomb and worked for disarmament at the United Nations' Atomic Energy Agency. He was accused of anti-American behaviour during the 1950s Communist witch hunts. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Physics three times, but never won it.

- Flirted with communism.
- Nominated for the Nobel Prize.



1904-1967

Theodore Van Kirk

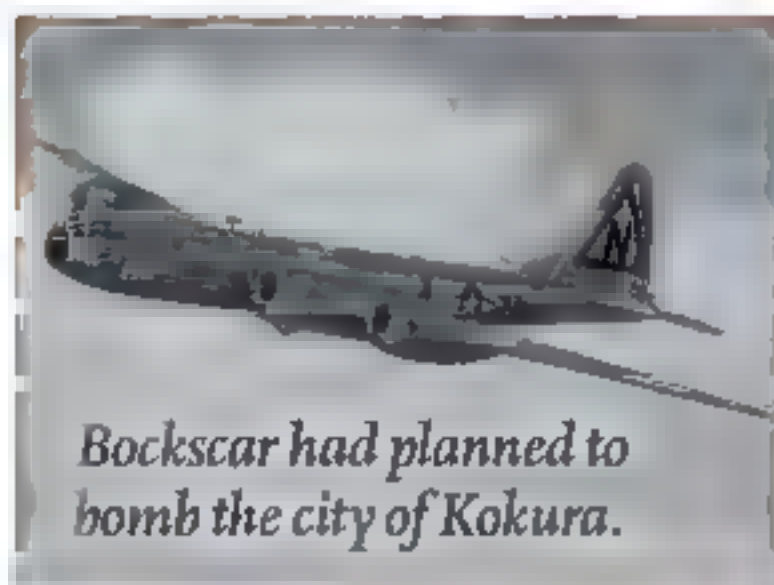


# Bombers had long flight home

The plane that bombed Hiroshima returned as scheduled, but the Nagasaki bomber didn't have enough fuel and had to land on Okinawa to avoid crashing into the ocean.

## 4 Mission accelerated

The weather forecast brings the second mission forward to 9th August. B-29 bomber *Bockscar* leaves in haste with a faulty fuel pump.



## 3 Hiroshima will be the first target

The uranium bomb *Little Boy* explodes at 08.15 on 6th August. The bomb is detonated at a height of 576 metres to inflict the greatest possible damage.

## 5 Kokura saved by weather

Visibility at Kokura is so bad that *Bockscar* is forced to fly to the mission's secondary target: Nagasaki.

## 6 Nagasaki is wiped out

Plutonium bomb *Fat Man* is detonated at 11.02 on 9th August at 549 metres altitude. The port of Nagasaki is laid to waste.

## 7 Emergency landing

Fuel consumption on the mission has been too high, and *Bockscar* lands on Okinawa with just five minutes of fuel left.

## 2 Planes meet in the air

The other two B-29s join *Enola Gay* as observation aircraft, to take measurements and photographs.

## 1 Three B-29s dispatched

*Enola Gay* lifts off from base, six hours from its target. Two other B-29s also take to the air, but all fly separate routes to Iwo Jima, which is the agreed rendezvous point.



Thomas Ferebee

Paul Tibbets

— *Enola Gay's route*  
6th August

- - - *Bockscar's route*  
9th August

Cockpit crew of the *Enola Gay* photographed after they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima.



too badly damaged by conventional bombs. That way the US Air Force could test the bomb's destructive power. At the same time, Groves wanted to choose a city of cultural significance to break Japan's fighting spirit.

Suspiciously, the lieutenant general hadn't yet named the city he was thinking of. Stimson demanded to see the plan listing bombing targets. Groves demurred – it was in his office and “would take time to get it”.

“I have all day”, the minister of war replied. “Here's a phone on this desk. You pick it up and call your office and have them bring the report over.” Groves duly obeyed. While they waited, Stimson pressed him on what the primary target was.

“Kyoto”, Groves replied.

“I will not approve that city!” Stimson replied bluntly. He'd honeymooned in Kyoto and been captivated by the city and its

**Japan sought nuclear weapons, but the researchers in the empire's development programme for the new super bombs weren't as far advanced as their competitors in the US.**

culture. Kyoto had been the imperial capital from 794-1868 and held both historic and architectural significance. Groves was furious. Kyoto presented the obvious target, but Stimson refused to budge. Choosing Kyoto would be to destroy one of civilisation's cultural highlights. It would be the equivalent of razing Rome or Athens to the ground.

Groves was pressured into giving up. Kyoto was to be spared. Now the two men had to select a new primary target. They jointly examined the list when it appeared: “Hiroshima?”

### 05.00, 16TH JULY, NEW MEXICO

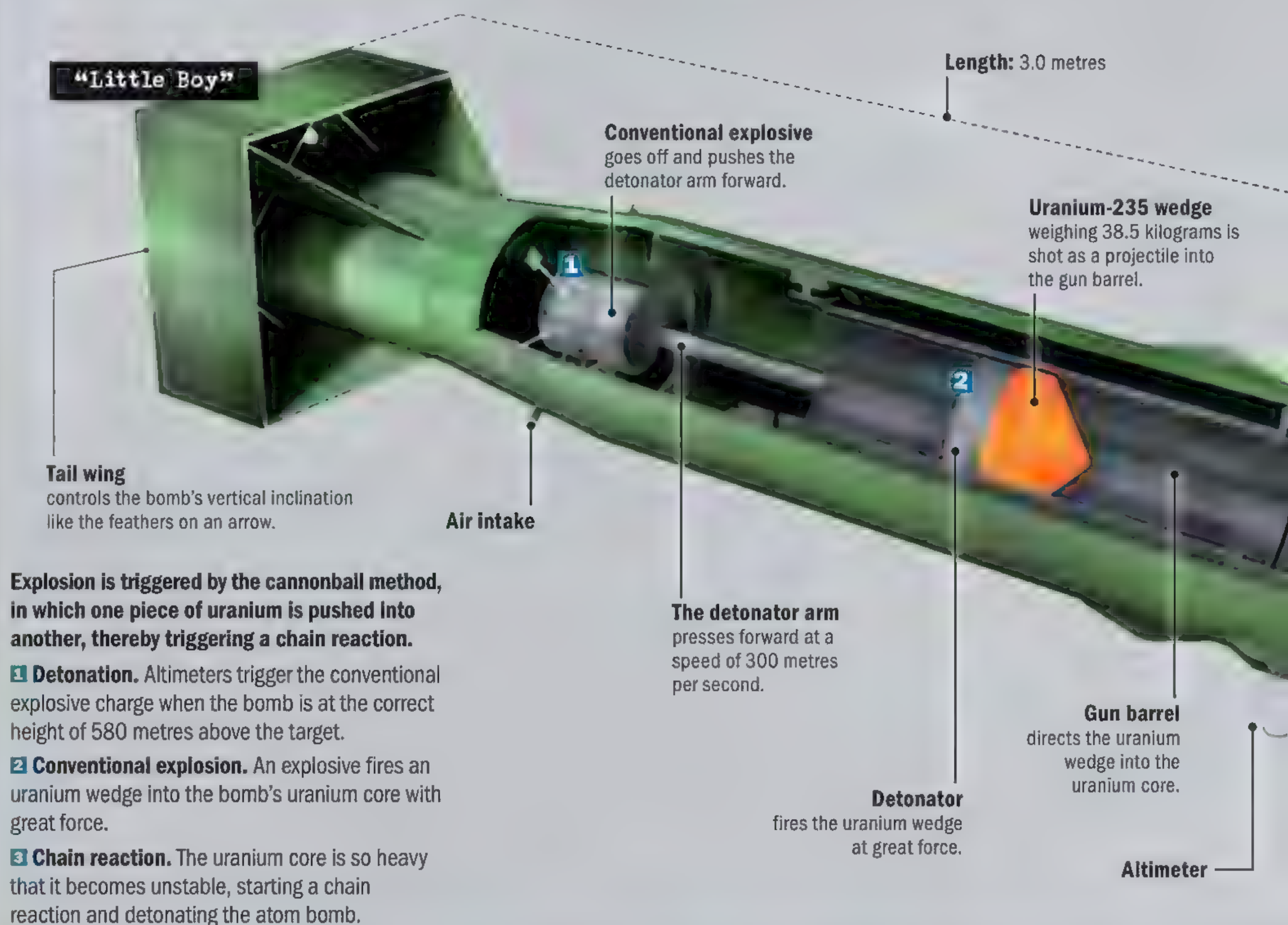
Los Alamos Laboratory's chief J. R. Oppenheimer leads the preparations for history's first nuclear test.

It was still dark. The atom bomb dubbed *The Gadget* hung in a high steel tower in the middle of the desolate desert landscape. 425 scientists and military personnel had taken

## WEAPON

# Atom bomb was armed in transit

For safety reasons, the first atom bomb – *Little Boy* – wasn't armed when the plane lifted off from Tinian. An armed uranium bomb might detonate if the plane crashed.





their places in concrete bunkers and trenches. Some were only 10 kilometres from the bomb. The air practically quivered in excitement. Some observers were betting if the bomb would work, with one going further, to the irritation of Groves:

"I had become a bit annoyed... when he suddenly offered to take wagers from his fellow scientists on whether or not the bomb would ignite the atmosphere", he recalled.

Groves had spent the weekend writing a number of press releases to cover all possible outcomes. "A mammoth explosion today resulted in widespread destruction of property and great loss of life", read one.

Physicist Edward Teller made bystanders even more nervous when he began to cover himself in suntan lotion in the pitch dark before handing the bottle to the next observer.

"One bomb produced... was estimated to have the explosive force of 2,000-20,000 tonnes of TNT", was project manager Oppenheimer's cautious estimate. In fact, no one could predict the new superbomb's likely effect. Oppenheimer and Groves had deliberately placed

themselves in two different bunkers – just in case. The bomb was armed, and the countdown began. Most observers lay down.

12, 11, 10...

"Man, I'm afraid", came a voice in the darkness.

Lieutenant General Groves was more concerned about what to do if the new superbomb didn't work.

3, 2, 1...

The clock was exactly 05.30 when *The Gadget* exploded with a power equal to 18,000 tonnes of TNT. A dazzling multi-coloured light illuminated the night sky. Although all the observers wore protective goggles, they were stunned by the glare. Then came a gigantic bang followed by an earthquake-like shockwave. Observers closest to the explosion were thrown to the ground, despite being behind concrete walls. A mushroom cloud several kilometres high towered over the desolate landscape.

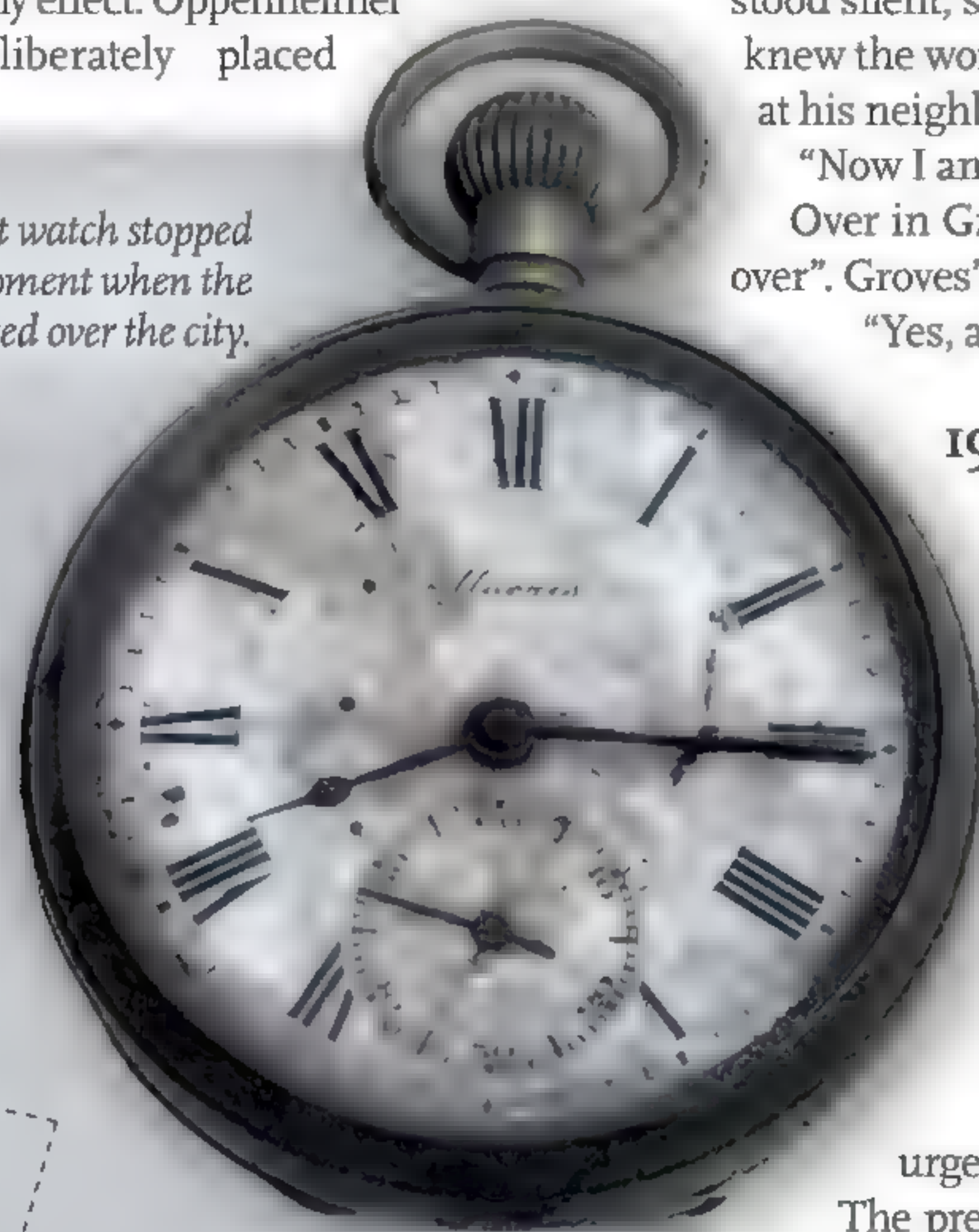
Some observers cried, others cheered, but most simply stood silent, staring into the sky. Oppenheimer immediately knew the world would never be the same again. He glanced at his neighbour, quoting an ancient Hindu text:

"Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds."

Over in Groves' bunker, a general stated that "the war is over". Groves' reply was swift and short.

"Yes, after we drop two bombs on Japan."

This Hiroshima pocket watch stopped at 08.15 – the exact moment when the atom bomb detonated over the city.



## 19.30, 16TH JULY, POTSDAM, NEAR BERLIN, GERMANY

Allied leaders Harry S Truman, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin meet for a conference in occupied Germany.

Secretary of War Stimson sat in the US delegation's villa outside Berlin as a top-secret telegram arrived from the project leaders in Los Alamos:

"Operated on this morning. Diagnosis not yet complete but results seem satisfactory and already exceed expectations."

The atom bomb was ready! Stimson headed urgently to deliver the message directly to Truman.

The president would be thrilled: the bomb could solve two of his most pressing problems with one stroke: to end the war and put a block on the Soviet Union's expansionist zeal.

## 24TH JULY, POTSDAM

Truman decides to give Stalin a hint of the new weapon.

President Truman had no interest in giving the Russians a major insight into US military secrets, but there were two good reasons to give Stalin a little glimpse.

The Red Army had been the world's largest and strongest ground force since 1942, and Russian confidence was at its peak. It was reflected in their demands during the tough negotiations after the great powers had shared victory in Europe. It would be useful to throw an American trump card on the table, but at the same time it was important to maintain a good relationship with the Soviets who'd been a crucial ally in the struggle against the Germans and would hopefully soon join the Allies in the final showdown with the Japanese.

If the US used the atom bomb without telling the Russians something in advance, they would be seriously insulted. Truman couldn't deny a certain delight at

### Altimeter

ensures that the bomb goes off at the most destructive height above the target.

### Lead shield

protects personnel against radiation during transport.

### Reinforcement bolts

## LITTLE BOY WAS EXPLOSIVE

- Weight: 4,400 kilograms
- Diameter: 71 centimetres
- Armament: 64-kg Uranium-235
- Explosive force: 15 kilotons

**Uranium-235**  
**25.5-kg core**  
combines with the wedge. Together they reach a critical mass and explode.



Hiroshima 160 metres north-west of the centre of the explosion. The rubble had been a trade fair where industrial products from the city's factories were on display.



now being able to surprise – perhaps even shock – the Soviet leader. He walked over to Stalin, who was chain-smoking as he stood during a break in the negotiations.

“We have a new weapon of unusual destructive force”, Truman said without preamble. He waited for a reaction, but it didn’t come. Stalin was apparently completely unsurprised.

“I hope you make good use of it against Japan”, the Soviet leader replied briefly. Stalin had no reason to be surprised. Soviet spies in Los Alamos kept him fully informed of the

bomb’s evolution. He’d known about it for years – much longer than Truman.

### 25TH JULY, POTSDAM

**Truman orders the nuclear bomb be deployed against Japan.**

The president bent over the desk. In front of him lay a document that would change history. It just required his signature. Despite the far-reaching consequences, Truman was in no doubt: the atom bomb had to be used.

“I made that decision in the conviction it would save hundreds of thousands of lives – Japanese as well as American”, Truman said in 1953 when leaving the White House.

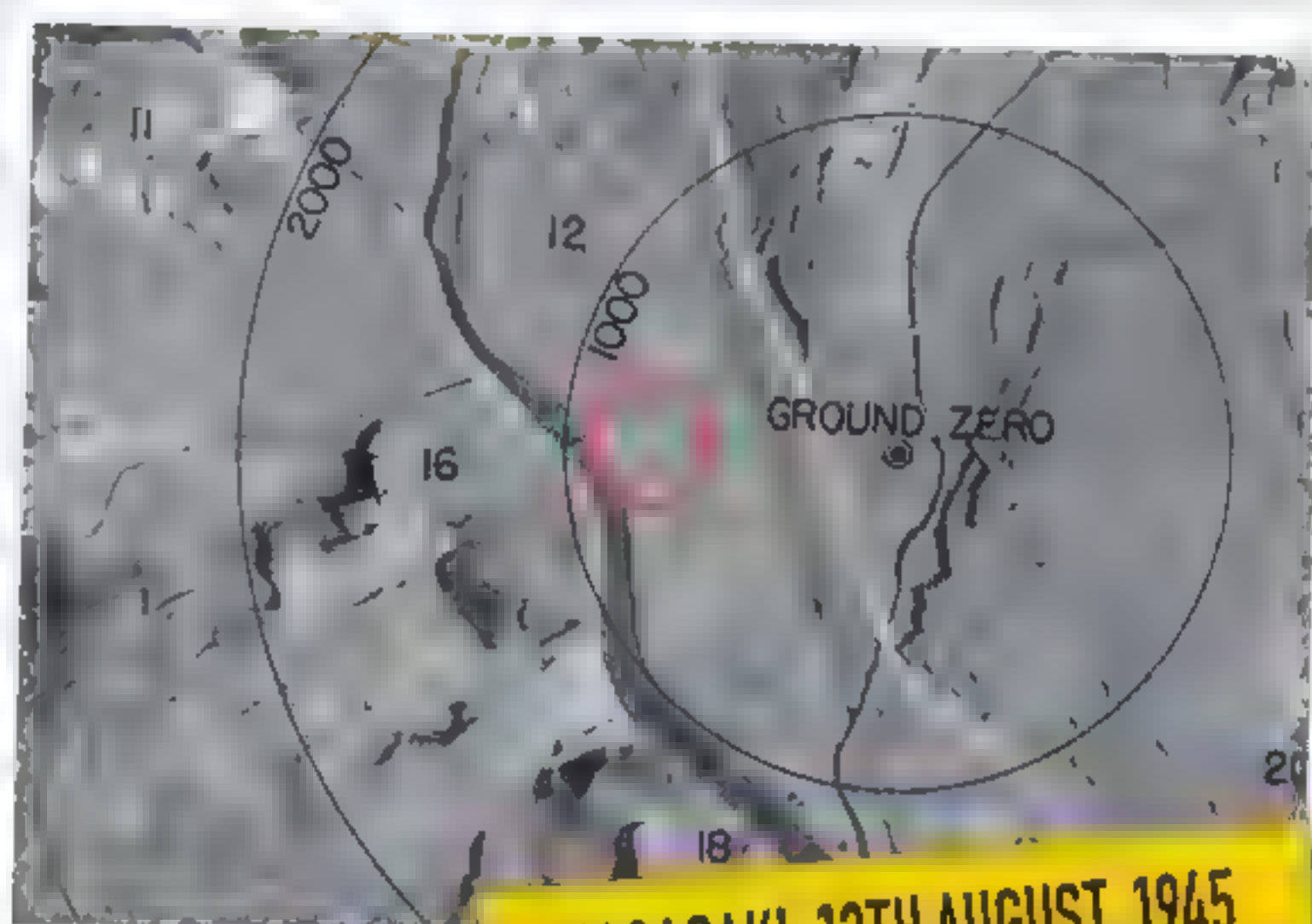
Military analysts estimated that if the Japanese fought to the last man, it would cost up to one million US soldiers’ lives – in

addition to the approximately 400,000 who’d already died. Truman couldn’t tolerate a loss of that magnitude when he had another option. In addition, all his advisers urged him to use the bomb immediately. No one recommended otherwise. For one



**NAGASAKI, 7TH AUGUST, 1945**

Aerial view of Nagasaki before and after the attack. The bridge was the target of the atom bomb Fat Man.



**NAGASAKI, 12TH AUGUST, 1945**

The bridge survived, but everything else within a radius of 1.5 km was completely destroyed.





last time, Truman's eyes ran over the text that would order the US Air Force to drop one or more atom bombs over a list of selected Japanese cities from 3rd August, weather permitting. The president's pen scratched his signature on the paper.

**02.45, 6TH AUGUST, AIRBASE ON TINIAN ISLAND**  
Japan has rejected the Allied demands to surrender unconditionally or face "prompt and utter destruction". The first nuclear attack begins. 30-year-old pilot Colonel Paul Tibbets gave the B-29 *Enola Gay*'s four engines full throttle and accelerated down the short runway.

"Let's go", he said, forcing the heavily loaded bomber into the air. Most of his crew remained in the dark as to their exact mission. Their skipper was sending strange coded messages over the radio, and otherwise barely speaking. But Tibbets knew a tape recorder was capturing everything they said. He was also the only one on board who knew they carried an atom bomb and must drop it over Hiroshima.

As the plane approached its target and the bomb was primed, Tibbets finally addressed the crew over the intercom: "We are carrying the world's first atom bomb." After audible gasps from some of the crew, Tibbets continued. "When the bomb is dropped, Lieutenant Beser will record our reactions

to what we see. This recording is being made for history. Watch your language and don't clutter up the intercom."

**08.00, 6TH AUGUST, HIROSHIMA CITY CENTRE**  
Tsutomu Yamaguchi walks through the streets of the old port towards the train station.

29-year-old engineer Tsutomu Yamaguchi lived in Nagasaki, but had spent the previous three months in Hiroshima working in the shipbuilding department of his employer, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. Now he was done. In a few hours, the train would depart and tomorrow he would be reunited with his wife and small son. He was looking forward to it.

Suddenly, the dutiful Yamaguchi stopped abruptly. He suddenly realised that he'd left his personal stamp at the yard office. Too bad, but luckily there was enough time to pick it up. He turned on his heels and returned to the shipyard on the city's outskirts.

**08.15, 6TH AUGUST, THE AIRSPACE ABOVE THE PRIMARY TARGET OF HIROSHIMA**  
B-29 bomber *Enola Gay* circles over the city. Visibility is good. "Do you agree that's the target?" Tibbets asked. "Yes", replied weaponeer Captain William Parsons. Below

**5,000 degrees**

was the temperature reached when the atom bomb exploded over Hiroshima. Iron melted and humans evaporated. The heat was the same as on the sun's surface.





*Hiroshima's survivors became ill from radiation poisoning, and casualties were high long after the explosion.*

them lay the centre of Hiroshima, where tens of thousands of people were rushing like ants through the streets.

Tibbets ordered the others to get ready: "We are about to start the bomb run. Put your goggles on."

The bomb hatches were opened, and the bombardier Thomas Ferebee lay in his seat. He used the radio to request Tibbets make the necessary course corrections before sounding the message: "Bomb away." The bomb had been dropped.

Tibbets gave the engines full throttle. Now it was a case of escaping the blast zone. Behind them, the bomb dropped slowly towards the city, hanging from two parachutes. *Enola Gay* was 18 kilometres away when the bomb detonated.

Suddenly a bright light filled the cabin and the bomber was shaken by a powerful shockwave, before a mushroom-like cloud rose over Hiroshima.

### 08.15, 6TH AUGUST, HIROSHIMA CITY CENTRE

The air alarm has sounded, but when radar fails to detect the presence of a major bombing raid, it's switched off again.

Tsutomu Yamaguchi strode towards the shipyard in a good mood. It was a lovely summer morning, and he was surrounded by crowds of children and adults on their way to school and at work.

Suddenly the sky dazzled, and everything was immersed in a glaring white light. Yamaguchi heard a deafening crash and was blown over. The injured ship designer only gradually regained consciousness. At first, he could neither see nor hear.

"When I opened my eyes, everything was dark", he later recalled. One ear drum had been ruptured.

As his vision gradually returned, he could see a huge column of smoke rising to the heavens a few miles away. Yamaguchi checked his legs: he could still move. "I thought, 'If I stay here, I'll die'", and he began to drag himself away. It was only now the young engineer discovered his entire upper body had been

badly burned. Around him lay complete devastation. The bodies of men, women and children were littered everywhere. Survivors staggered around the burning ruins of the city.

The extreme heat wave from the explosion had instantly killed everyone and anything within a radius of over 1.5 kilometres from the epicentre. It had set fire to skin and boiled people's internal organs. Birds in the sky erupted in flames.

The shockwave had practically levelled the entire city to the ground and hurled large, red-hot shards of iron and concrete in all directions. Now choking clouds of dust had begun to blow through the city while a black, oily rain fell.

A horse was burning, while a column of half-dead, burned soldiers wandered silent and ghost-like over a bridge. People were dying in indescribable pain and many threw themselves into the river to escape the flames or cool their burns in the running water. The bomb had acted like a deadly flash – even the patterns of clothes had been burned onto victims' bodies.

Yamaguchi struggled to a shelter. Now it was about survival. He focussed on one thing: the desire to see his family again.

### 6TH AUGUST, TOKYO

Japan's premier has heard of a major explosion in Hiroshima.

Prime Minister Suzuki was extremely concerned by the messages coming from Hiroshima's neighbouring towns. Nobody knew much, but something terrible had hit Hiroshima. According to military high command, no major formations of enemy bombers

*The melted tricycle was buried together with its owner, three-year Shin, in Hiroshima.*





had been sighted near the city, and yet it was completely impossible to contact.

The pilot of a Japanese aircraft recently announced that a huge smoke cloud had risen over Hiroshima. He could see it from 160 kilometres away. It sounded incredible.

Suzuki discovered the cause via a US news broadcast. President Truman officially announced that the US Air Force had dropped a so-called atom bomb over Japan.

The message was accompanied by another warning to the Japanese: if they didn't surrender, "they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth."

### 03.47, 9TH AUGUST, TINIAN AIRBASE

Three days after the Hiroshima bomb, the Japanese have not yet surrendered, and the United States launches another nuclear attack.

Pilot Charles Sweeney lifted the heavily loaded B-29 *Bockscar* off into the darkness and set off towards Japan.

The plan was clear: the atom bomb *Fat Man* was to be dropped over the city of Kokura, a strategic military target. But the weather was worse than predicted, and it was only once Sweeney was in the air that he discovered a defective pump, giving him no access to his reserve fuel tank.

When the plane finally reached Kokura, the target was covered by clouds. Sweeney circled several times in hopes of a solution, but nothing presented itself. The B-29's fuel situation gradually became critical and Sweeney faced a difficult decision. He couldn't land with the bomb aboard, so he either had to drop it in an unarmed state into the sea or try to reach Nagasaki. The city had been designated as a secondary target, which he was free to choose if Kokura was obscured by cloud.

Sweeney decided to fly to Nagasaki. Thick cloud also covered this city as he arrived, but as Sweeney was about to give up the clouds suddenly parted. At 11.01 he spied the city. He immediately seized his opportunity and dropped the bomb. 50 seconds later it detonated.

### 11.02, 9TH AUGUST, NAGASAKI

After his nightmare in Hiroshima, the wounded Tsutomu Yamaguchi had only just returned to Nagasaki the previous day. Yamaguchi refused to forsake his job. Although the young engineer had only just survived an atom bomb and was wrapped in bandages, he arrived in the company office to attend his duties. The time was 11.02, and Yamaguchi had just told his boss about the horrors of Hiroshima.

"A single bomb can't destroy a whole city!" was the sceptical reply. "You've obviously been badly injured and I think you've gone a little mad."

Yamaguchi had no time to respond. Everything was suddenly blinded by a shining glow, and Yamaguchi was blown over again. "I thought the mushroom cloud had followed me from Hiroshima", he later said.

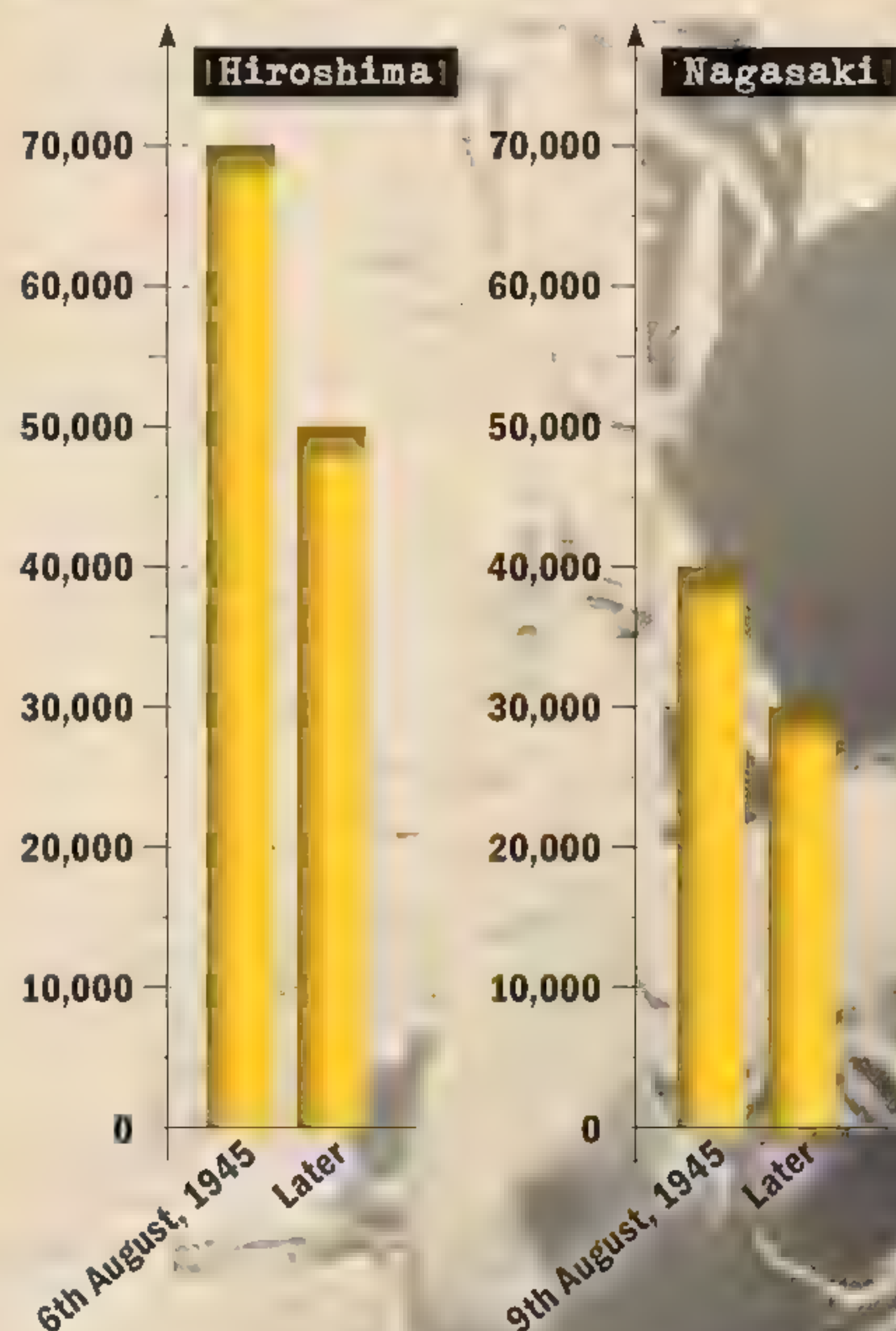
This time, the engineer was quickly back on his feet. Still covered in bandages, he walked home through the ruined city, full of concern for his wife and son. To his overwhelming relief, Yamaguchi found both alive.

The devastation in Nagasaki was less than Hiroshima, as the bomb had exploded around three kilometres outside the city centre. Nevertheless, 40,000 people still died immediately under the mushroom cloud.

# Bombs killed unprecedented numbers

Over 100,000 people were killed instantly by the bombs, and more died shortly after through injuries, burns and – in particular – radiation sickness.

Died by atomic bomb explosion



In many cases, survivors were left disfigured by terrible burns.



*For 22-year-old Kenji Hatanaka, surrender was unforgivably shameful and the major would do anything to ensure he died fighting.*

Kenji Hatanaka

1945  
15<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST



# OFFICERS FIGHT TO THE DEATH

After the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan's emperor is ready to submit, but a small group of fanatical officers refuses to accept such humiliation. If the officers' coup is successful, Japan will be destroyed.

**Red Army Thrusting Rapidly Towards Harbin—P. 3**

**fortuna  
cloth**

CITY FORECAST: Fine, mild day, with moderate south-west wind. Cold night.

SYDNEY

HIGH TIDE 12.38 A.M. (37.1 Hrs.).

**DAILY MIRROR**

Registered at the General Post Office, Sydney for transmission by post as a newspaper.

No. 1317.

SYDNEY, TUESDAY, AUGUST 14, 1945.

Price, 2d.

**LATE  
FINAL  
EXTRA**

# HIROHITO FACES PALACE REVOLT

## Dramatic Scene In Tokio

(Daily Mirror World Cables and Special Correspondents)

**T**HERE have been dramatic scenes inside the Imperial Palace at Tokio, according to reports trickling out of Japan to neutral capitals.

Grave-faced Hirohito dismissed eight generals and admirals holding key posts in the Suzuki Government and appointed his own peace Cabinet say observers.

### Industrialists Panic

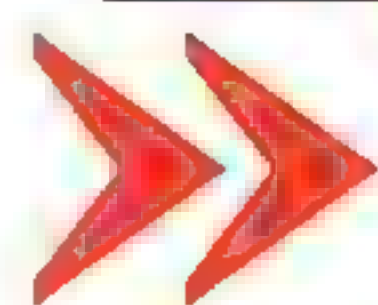
So the emperor succeeded in forestalling a generals' revolt which aimed at setting up a military dictatorship.

THE High Command revolt was this morning that no word had been led by Field-Marshal Hata, been





## THE STAGE IS SET



Japan is on its knees. The army and navy are on the verge of being wiped out. The island of Okinawa has fallen and the Allies are able to fly bombing missions over Japan at will. The emperor and government see surrender as the only option, but such humiliation is unthinkable for a handful of young officers.



**I**T WAS 01.00 ON 15TH AUGUST, 1945 IN TOKYO. Only a week before, nuclear bombs had destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Now the ominous howls of sirens sounded again as US bombers cut through the night sky. Civilians crawled together in crude shelters and prayed that they wouldn't be the next victims of an atomic bomb.

Meanwhile, a drama of a different sort had begun to unfold behind the walls of the Japanese Imperial Palace in the city centre. Lieutenant General Takeshi Mori, commander of the Imperial Guard was working at his headquarters inside the palace. In contrast to the rest of the population, he knew that the war would be over in 11 hours. As soon as the state radio station, NHK, broadcast Emperor Hirohito's speech ordering the country's surrender – a speech already recorded and scheduled to air later that day – everyone would know that the war was over and that Japan had lost.

Opposite Mori were two young commanders, Colonel Masataka Ida and Colonel Jiro Shiizaki. Both belonged to a secret group of officers who believed that surrender was an humiliation too great to bear. The group saw only one solution: it had to prevent the emperor's speech from ever being

transmitted. That way, the surrender would never become official. The US would be forced to invade Japan. Millions of Japanese would die in the battle, but the country's honour would be preserved.

Ida and Shiizaki sat silently waiting for the chief conspirator and mastermind behind the planned coup, Major Kenji Hatanaka, to appear. The delay proved too much, however, and eventually Ida felt compelled to speak. "General Mori, we still believe we have a chance to save Japan from a shameful surrender, but we need the Imperial Guard to join us."

"I sympathise with you and I respect your position", Mori replied. "In other circumstances, I might have even joined you, but it is no longer possible. I have sworn to abide by the emperor's wishes."

As Ida was aware, Mori was responsible for protecting Japan's divine emperor, who was then just a few hundred metres from the general's office in the Imperial Palace, but Ida continued trying to

1901-1989



NAME

**SHOWA TENNO HIROHITO**

TITLE

EMPEROR

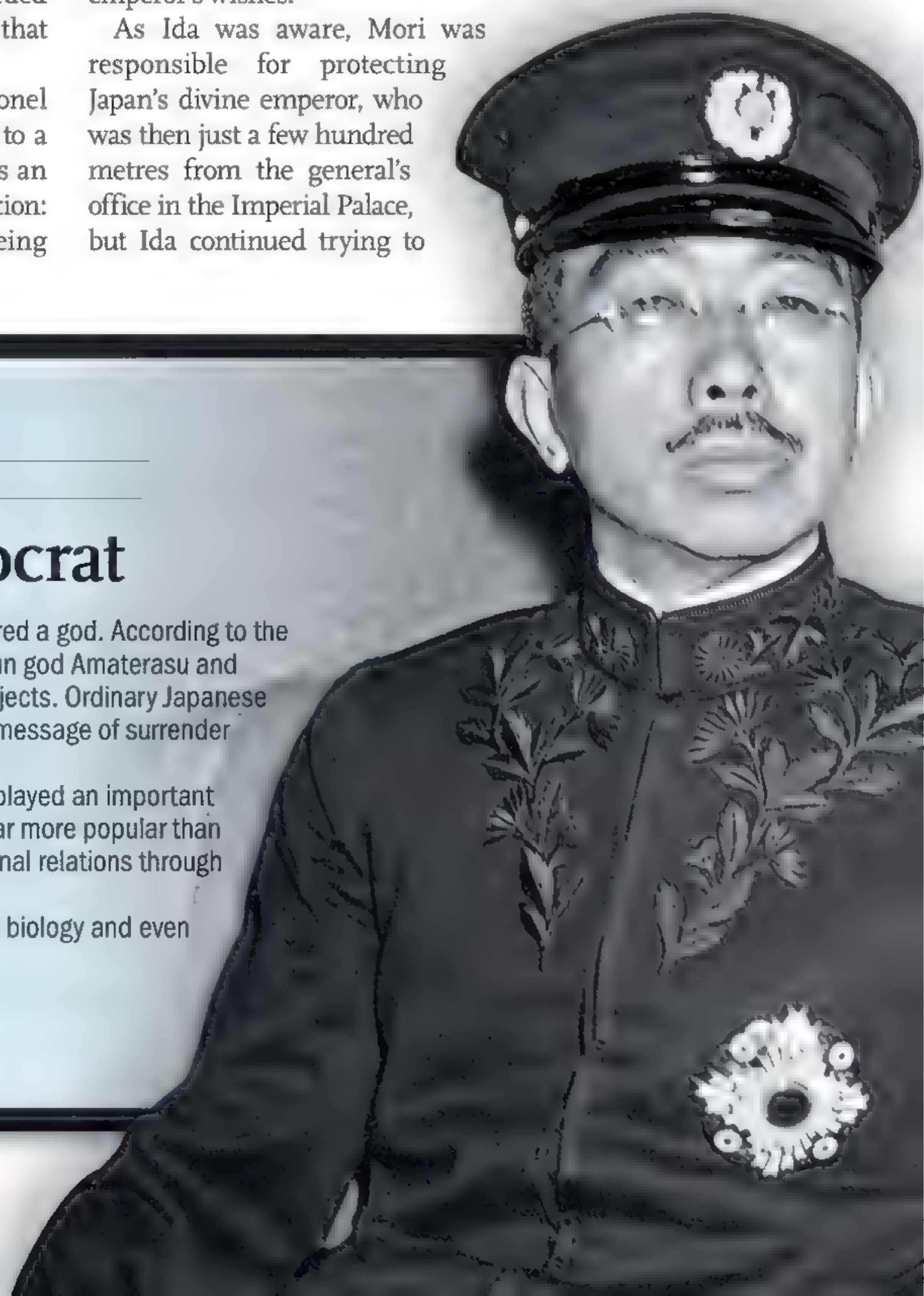
## Ruler became democrat

For centuries the Japanese emperor had been considered a god. According to the Shinto religion, the ruling family descended from the sun god Amaterasu and Emperor Hirohito was a distant deity to most of his subjects. Ordinary Japanese people had never heard their emperor's voice until his message of surrender was eventually broadcast on the radio.

After the war, Hirohito gave up his divine status and played an important role in Japan's transition to a democracy. He became far more popular than his predecessors and helped rebuild Japan's international relations through numerous state visits.

Throughout his life, Hirohito was interested in marine biology and even published scientific dissertations.

- Officially abolished imperial divinity.
- Acted as an emissary to Europe and the US.







Approximately 100,000 people died and a million more became homeless in Tokyo following air strikes in March 1945. The destruction of the capital along with the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki persuaded the emperor that further battle was futile.

persuade him for more than an hour. The wily general refused to give a definitive answer, though.

### MAJOR SLAYS SUPERIOR

The argument continued until Hatanaka appeared at the general's door. Realising that Ida had failed to win Mori's support and suspecting that the general's claim that he needed to pray before coming to a decision was a ploy to play for time, he saw red.

"This is a waste of time", he bellowed. A rebel soldier took this as a cue for action and raised his sword, only to see one of Mori's aides move to protect the general. The aide was struck down and a second rebel decapitated him. At the same instant, Hatanaka drew his gun and shot the general, killing him instantly. The aide's bloody head stared up from the floor of the office. Ida was horrified.

"I did it because there was no time left. I'm sorry", Hatanaka muttered to the colonel as he left the office, weapon in hand.

The rebel officers knew that there was no way back from this point. The coup had begun and Hatanaka was resolute about what needed to be done. He seized Mori's official stamp and set its seal on a forged order that he'd prepared earlier.

The order transferred command of the Imperial Guard to himself, so that he could use the troops to search the palace for the emperor's speech. The speech had been recorded on two vinyl records that, according to Hatanaka's information, lay somewhere in the vast Imperial Palace.

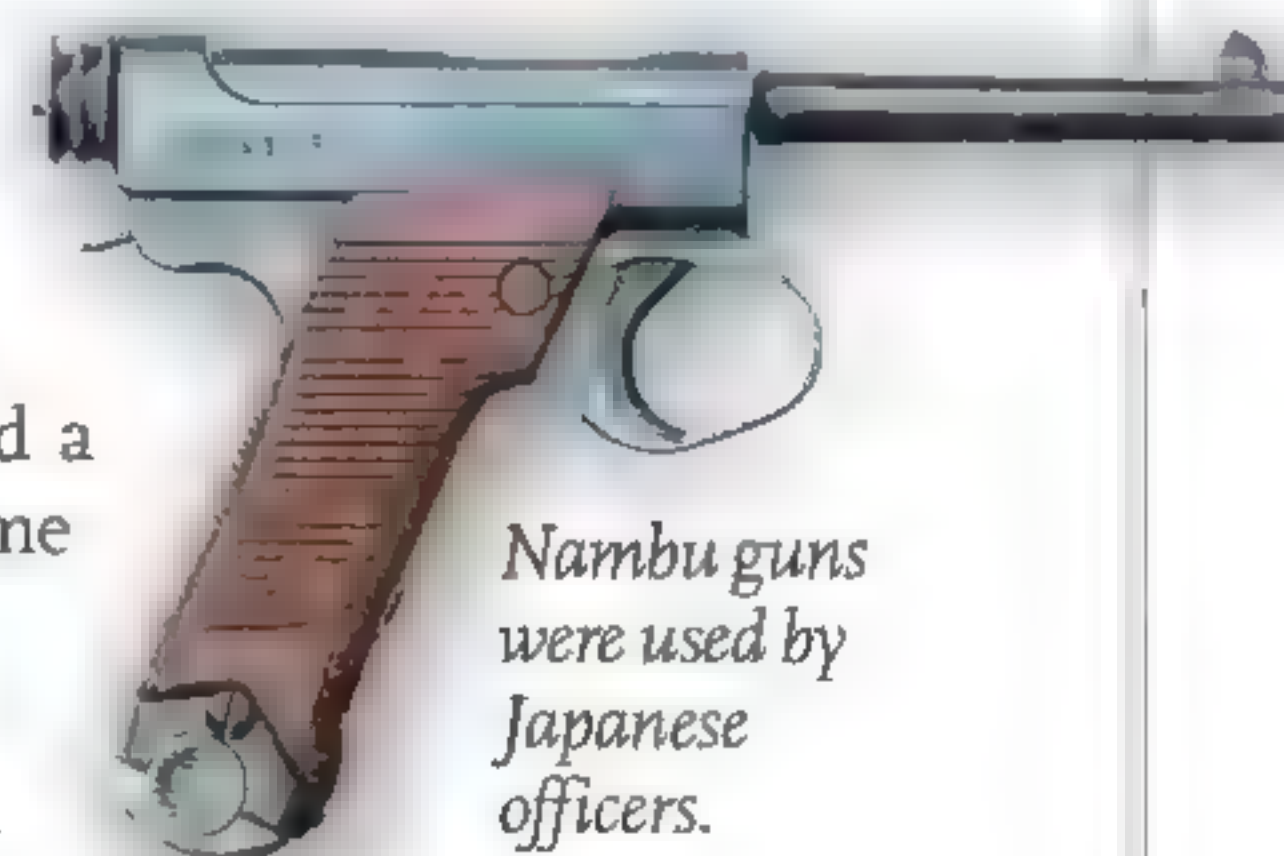
Success, despite Mori's unexpected resistance, was within reach and Hatanaka

was keen to save both his own and Japan's honour. Three weeks earlier, Emperor Hirohito and his staff had received an ultimatum from the Allies. Britain, the US and China demanded the immediate and unconditional surrender of Japan. However, Japan's prime minister, Kantaro Suzuki, decreed that the Allies' demands should be met with *mokusatsu* – a silence that kills.

The Japanese soon realised that ignoring the Allies was a fatal mistake. On 6th August, the US dropped the atomic bomb known as *Little Boy* on Hiroshima, killing 70,000 Japanese in a few seconds. On 8th August, the Soviet Union declared war and the following day the US dropped a second nuclear bomb, this time wiping out Nagasaki.

US President Harry S Truman made Japan's position clear following the attack on Hiroshima: "If they do not now accept our terms they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth."

The attacks settled the case for the emperor who had received reports of the all-encompassing destruction in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. At noon on 14th August, a pale Hirohito announced to his ministers that he intended to meet the enemy's demand for surrender. "I appreciate how difficult it will be for the officers and men of the army and navy to surrender their arms to the enemy and see their homeland occupied... In spite of these feelings, so difficult to bear, I cannot



Nambu guns were used by Japanese officers.

**"I did it because there was no time left. I'm sorry."**

Major Kenji Hatanaka



endure the thought of letting my people suffer any longer. A continuation of the war would bring death to tens, perhaps even hundreds, of thousands of people. The whole nation would be reduced to ashes." As he spoke, tears ran down Hirohito's face and soon everyone in the room was weeping.

The emperor left the meeting with two radio technicians to record his speech accepting the Allies' demand for surrender. The plan was that the emperor's speech should be broadcast the following day. The Japanese people would hear that the war was finally over from the emperor's own lips.

On the afternoon of 14th August, war minister General Korechika Anami convened his staff and informed them that he, along with other senior military officers, intended to support the emperor's decision to surrender, even going so far as to declare that "If anyone here wishes to act contrary to His Majesty's decision, he will have to do so over my dead body."

Hatanaka, who was among the ministerial staff, was furious. He had believed that Anami – the most powerful person in Japan after the emperor – would do his utmost to prevent a

surrender. The minister had, after all, been quoted in the press three days earlier saying, "Even though we have to eat grass, swallow dirt and lie in the fields, we shall fight on to the bitter end, ever firm in our faith that we shall find life in death."

Anami's apparent U-turn didn't deter Hatanaka, though. On the contrary, he was keener than ever to fight on, declaring to Ida that, "Even if it means that in the end I must be called a traitor, I would rather fight the enemy than entrust my emperor and my country into his [the enemy's] hands."

Hatanaka lived by the ancient Bushido code of the samurai, in which warriors were expected above all else to be loyal, courageous and honourable, even in the face of death. To Hatanaka, surrender was *haji*, an unbearable humiliation.

Hatanaka decided it was up to him to lead the rebellion. He spent the following few hours rallying as much support as possible to his cause. By 01.00 on 15th August, his rapidly hatched plan for a coup had received the support of six colonels, but the most important piece was still missing: if Hatanaka could not get General Mori and the Imperial Guard to join the conspiracy, it would be difficult to implement.

Now, however, Hatanaka found himself standing with a smoking gun in his hand, looking at Mori's dead body. The major had no doubt that he had done the right thing, but now he had two new problems to deal with: first, he had to dispose of Mori's bloody corpse, and second, he needed to locate the two discs on which the emperor's speech was recorded.

### SOLDIERS RANSACK THE PALACE

Together with Ida and Shiizaki, Hatanaka quickly hid the body, but the second task proved more difficult to accomplish. The Imperial Palace consisted of a large number of buildings spread over an enormous area and many of the complexes were dark due to the blackout necessitated by the American bombing raids.

Hatanaka needed people to help him achieve his objectives. Using the forged order, he ordered the Imperial Guard to cordon off and search the palace. The conspirators had to find the recording of the emperor's speech before the discs left the palace and reached the NHK radio station.

Fooled by Hatanaka's fake order, the Imperial Guard blockaded the heavy wooden entrance doors around the palace's perimeter and deployed troops to positions overlooking the moat with orders to shoot anything that moved. Inside, the palace resounded to the harsh notes of smashing glass and toppling cabinets. Soldiers stomped up and down dark corridors and roughly rummaged through drawers and store rooms to find the missing recording.

Hirohito quickly realised that something was amiss. As soon as the first soldiers appeared bearing search orders, the emperor took refuge in his bedroom. His personal bodyguards, loyal as ever,

## "I cannot endure... letting my people suffer any longer."

Japanese Emperor Hirohito

### Imperial couple were barricaded in bedroom

The emperor's survival was crucial if Japan was to surrender. Loyal guards protected Hirohito and his wife during the coup.

Officially, the story was that Emperor Hirohito and his wife Empress Nagako slept through the military coup, but the reality was very different. The insurgents were desperate to speak with the emperor and convince him to abandon the broadcast, so the royal couple spent the night as prisoners in their own bedroom, protected by the emperor's faithful bodyguards. The guards went so far as to fit iron bars to the windows to stop the rebels getting in.

The entrance to the palace precinct crossed a number of bridges.



The palace was richly decorated with crystal and precious woods.





## Rebels searched for the discs

Behind the walls of the Imperial Palace a lengthy drama played out during the early hours of 15th August, 1945. If the rebels found the discs with the emperor's speech, they could prevent it from being broadcast and prolong the war for months to come.



*The discs were recorded in advance of the broadcast and were housed in protective metal canisters.*

Kitanomaru Park

War Memorial Park

Fukiage Haven

Kunaicho Hospital

East Gardens

**3 Imperial bedroom**  
02.00: Emperor Hirohito seeks refuge in his bedroom. The emperor's personal bodyguard bar the windows to stop intruders.

**2 Imperial household**  
01.30: the rebels have control of most of the palace. A major hunt begins inside for the discs.

Main building

Nijubashi Bridge

Main entrance

Parliament building

**6 Sakashita-mon Gate**  
11.30: Hatanaka realises that all is lost. He takes his own life in front of the Sakashita gate. 30 minutes later the emperor announces Japan's surrender.

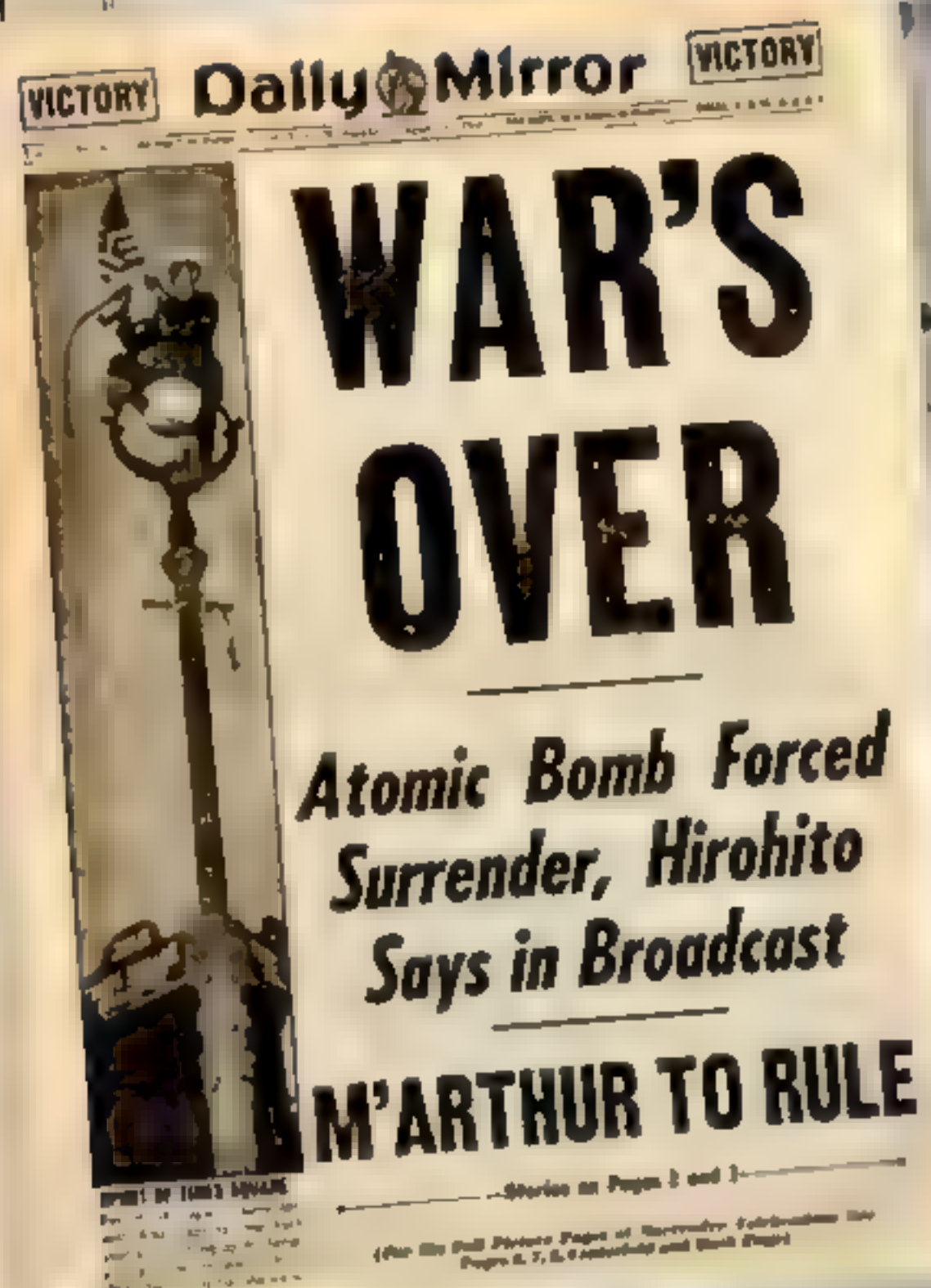
**4 War Ministry**  
04.00: Anami, Japan's tough war minister, commits ritual suicide at his office. Without Anami's support, the coup is almost certainly doomed.

**5 NHK, the state radio station**  
05.00: Hatanaka threatens the staff at NHK. He demands air time, but station staff there frustrate his plans.





The Japanese reacted with surprise and humility when the emperor revealed that Japan would surrender. Virtually everyone accepted the defeat and submitted to the Allied occupation without resistance.



The news of Japan's surrender officially marked the end of World War II.

barricaded the entrances and reinforced the windows with iron bars. The rebel officers made no serious attempt to enter Hirohito's chambers or squeeze him for information, though. In their eyes, the emperor was still a god who should, under no circumstances, be disturbed.

Instead, Hatanaka ordered his men to bring in Kenjiro Yabe, the head of NHK radio. The hope was that Yabe could tell them where the recording was stashed. But despite Yabe being confronted by a blood-soaked and raging Hatanaka, he replied, shaking, that he did not know where the recording was, only that the discs had been given to one of the palace's chamberlains.

### REBELLION STALLS

In the minutes that followed, Yabe was presented with one frightened chamberlain after another. At one point, the soldiers confronted Yoshihiro Tokugawa, the official who had been tasked with safeguarding the emperor's speech earlier that evening. The young chamberlain had chosen to hide them in a cloth bag that he placed inside a safe within a small office used by the Empress Nagako. Chamberlain Tokugawa was the only one who knew their location.

"Is it him?" Hatanaka asked, holding his sword before Yabe's face. Yabe shook his head. Hatanaka turned to

Tokugawa, threatening to disembowel him if Yabe lied, but both the chamberlain and Yabe remained silent.

While Hatanaka was searching the palace, he dispatched a group of insurgents to the nearby port city of Yokohama to assassinate the prime minister. The major was aware that Suzuki would not support the coup, but the prime minister had been warned of the insurrection and had escaped moments before the soldiers hammered on his door. Frustrated, the squad fired a hail of bullets into the prime minister's empty office, before setting it on fire.

Just after 03.00, Hatanaka received more bad news. Ida had returned from the army's headquarters with a disheartening report. "Eastern District won't go along... If you try to force this thing, there will be chaos. Face the facts, the coup has failed."

Without support and without finding the emperor's speech, the situation was critical. Hatanaka's final hope was to persuade Anami to join the rebellion, but that chance disappeared when he discovered that the war minister had just committed suicide by disembowelling himself according to the ancient samurai

rite of seppuku. He left behind him two scrolls. The first was in the form of death poem: "Having received great favour from his majesty, the emperor, there is nothing more for me to say in the hour of my death." The second read: "Believing firmly that our sacred land will never perish, I, with my death, humbly apologise to the emperor for the great crime."

**"I respect your feelings... but as an officer... you must obey the emperor."**

General Takashima to the rebellious major

Half an hour later, the coup's final death blow came in the form of a telephone call from General Tatsuhiko Takashima, chief of the Eastern District Army, which was responsible for the defence of the Tokyo and Yokohama metropolitan area.



Takashima refused to support Hatanaka's coup, ordering Hatanaka to quit the palace instead. "Your situation is hopeless. You are alone. You may think you are succeeding because you hold the palace temporarily, but you are defeated. You are like soldiers who defend a hopeless position in a cave without a way out."

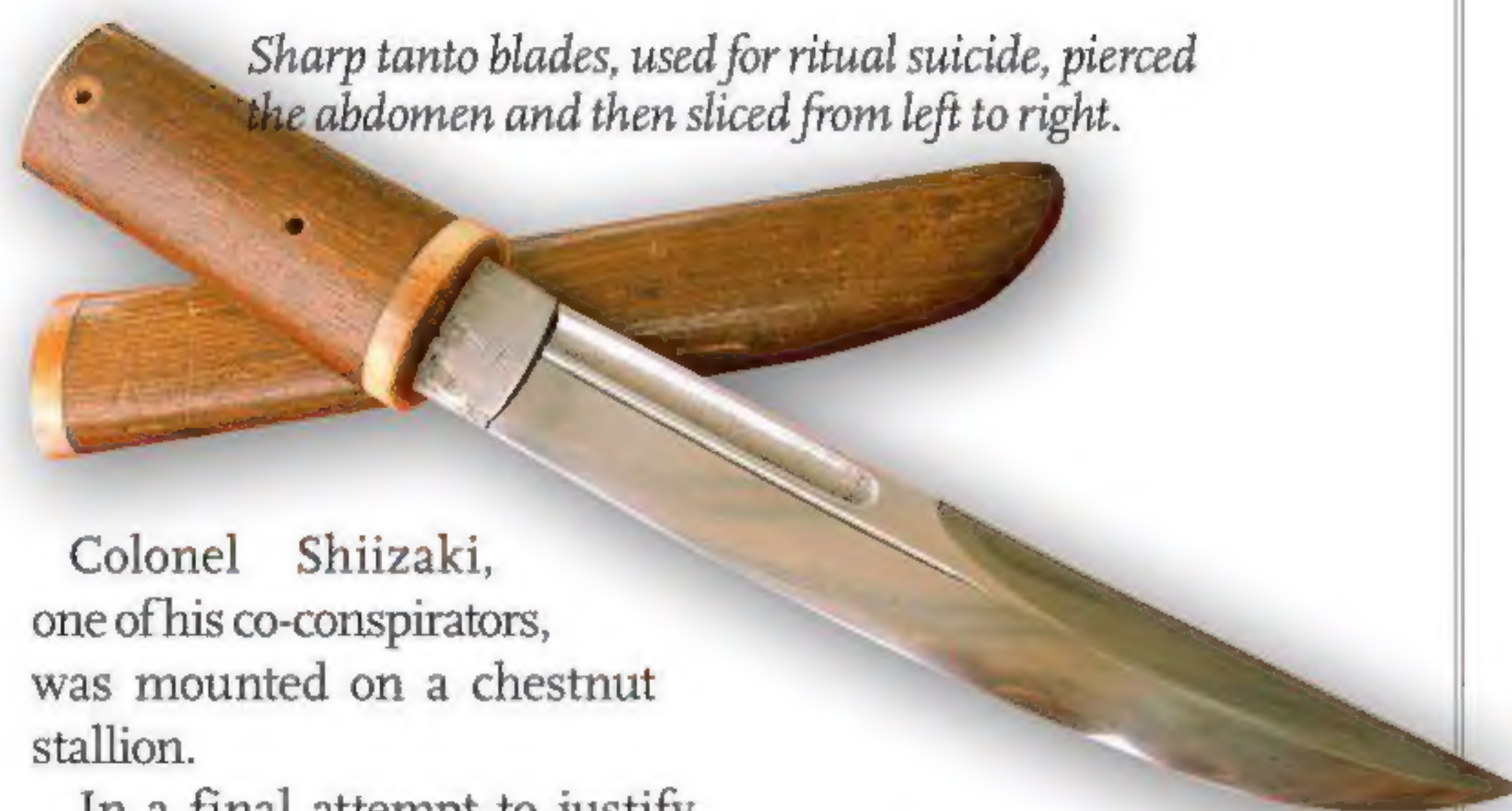
Hatanaka pleaded for understanding, but Takashima was unmoved, replying through the crackling telephone line: "Listen to me carefully. Don't do anything rash. You will only sacrifice more lives uselessly. I respect your feelings as a private individual, Hatanaka, but as an officer in the army you must obey the emperor. Japan's supreme virtue is in obedience."

Hatanaka hung up without answering. Furious, he decided on one final throw of the dice. He would try a direct appeal to like-minded troops. Accompanied by two soldiers, the major stormed the NHK radio station, which was close to the palace. It was just before 05.00. The speech would be broadcast in a few hours.

But again, Hatanaka would be thwarted. While he argued with the radio announcer on duty, radio technicians elsewhere in the building disconnected the station from the transmitter tower. Even if the desperate Hatanaka had managed to take the microphone by force, no-one would ever have heard him speak.

### UNITED TO THE DEATH

After a night of bloodshed and betrayal, it was clear to the major that the coup had failed. When the clock struck 11.00 on 15th August, 1945, the beautiful square in front of the Imperial Palace was overflowing with people. Men, women and children had come from near and far to listen to the emperor's advertised speech. Soon everyone would hear his words. As the crowd gathered, Hatanaka climbed astride a motorcycle. Next to him,



Colonel Shiizaki, one of his co-conspirators, was mounted on a chestnut stallion.

In a final attempt to justify the attempted coup, the pair rode around throwing hundreds of leaflets into the crowd. Printed on each page was the speech that Hatanaka had tried to broadcast the night before. The final line read, "We devoutly pray that the Japanese people and the country's armed forces appreciate the significance of our actions and that you will join us in the struggle for the preservation of our nation."

Their prayers went unanswered and Hatanaka and Shiizaki finally dismounted and moved to the edge of the square. Shiizaki slowly pushed up his uniform before slashing through the skin of his belly with a tanto blade and shooting himself. Moments later a second shot rang out over the square as Hatanaka put the barrel of his pistol to his forehead and pulled the trigger. In his pocket lay his suicide note in the form of a short poem. His final words read, "I have nothing to regret now that the dark clouds have disappeared from the reign of the emperor."

At noon, the emperor gave his speech as planned. When the news of Japan's surrender reached the White House in Washington, Truman declared solemnly, "Ladies and gentlemen, World War II is over."

### PERSPECTIVE

## Japan recovered

After the war, General Douglas MacArthur was stationed in Japan as military governor. He was given the task of transforming the former enemy nation into a modern democracy.

The victors were aware that reforms were needed to ensure popular support for Japan's democratisation. Over the next few years, the US helped oversee the redistribution of land and introduced free elections.

**350,000** Americans were stationed in Japan by the end of 1945.

**72.1%** voter turnout at Japan's first free elections on 10th April, 1946.

**23,000** square kilometres of land were sold cheaply to farmers from 1947-49.

**10%** Japan's annual economic growth rate after 1950.



Large numbers of women took part in the first free elections in 1946.



## COVER

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## WELCOME

P. 3: Scanpix

## CONTENTS

P. 4-5: Photo12/Collection Bernard Crochet/Alamy/Scanpix.

## DEATH COMES FROM THE SKIES

P. 6-7: Keystone-France/Gamma Keystone/Getty Images, p. 8-9: NARA 306548, p. 9: Wikimedia, Christoph Ornter/Ornter-Bach Collection, p. 10-11: Mikkel Juul Jensen, Keystone-France/Gamma Keystone/Getty Images, p. 11: airbornejumpjacket.com, www.lettrabe.es, p. 12: Wikimedia, p. 13: www.warchapter.com, www.internetmodeler.com, Mieczysław Peszek/ws.scn.ru, Bettman/Corbis/All Over Press, Wikimedia, iStock, p. 14: Hawaii War Records Depository Photos #HWRD 2166, PhotoQuest/Getty Images, Bettman/Corbis/All Over Press.

## JAPAN CLEARS PENINSULA OF ALLIED FORCES

P. 16-17: adoc-photos, p. 18: www.ebay.com, The Asahi Shimbun/Getty Images, p. 19: ullstein/Polfoto, Mary Evans/Scanpix, Bridgeman/Scanpix, Corbis/Getty Images, p. 20: Hulton/Keystone/Getty Images, p. 20-21: ullstein/Polfoto, p. 22: www.terapeak.com, www.sfasu.edu, p. 23: AP/Polfoto, Pacific Kilroy/flickr.com, p. 24: Wikimedia, adoc-photos, p. 25: Bridgeman, The Asahi Shimbun/Getty Images, p. 25: The Asahi Shimbun/Getty Images, p. 25: www.victoryarmynavy.com, Bridgeman.

## US SINKS JAPAN'S BIGGEST AIRCRAFT CARRIER

P. 26-27: Combination of official U.S. Navy photographs 80-G-312018 and 80-G-312019/2nd Class William G. Roy, USN; post-work Cobatfor/Wikimedia, p. 28: wwzdb.com, p. 29: Rear Admiral J. N. Wenger, Naval Security Group Command Display, Pensacola, FL/www.navychistory.com, Rear Admiral J. N. Wenger, Naval Security Group Command Display, Pensacola, FL/www.navychistory.com, www.hayesotoupalik.com, p. 30-31: Claus Lunau (illustration), U.S. Navy 80-G-12905/U.S. National Archives (NARA)/Wikimedia, p. 31: Granger/Polfoto, p. 32: Horace Bristol/Corbis/All Over Press, U.S. Navy National Museum of Naval Aviation 1996.253.999/Wikimedia, p. 33: Bettmann/Corbis/All Over Press, p. 34: U.S. Marine Corps, p. 34-35: Tony Bryan/Osprey, U.S. Navy 80-G-414423/U.S. National Archives (NARA)/Wikimedia, p. 35: Claus Lunau (illustration), U.S.

Government/Wikimedia, p. 36: U.S. Navy/Wikimedia, U.S. Navy 80-G-701900/www.ibiblio.org, p. 37: CP J. A. Mihalovic (U.S. Government)/Wikimedia, Mary Evans/Polfoto.

## ALLIES PUT THE BRAKES ON JAPAN'S FORWARD MARCH

P. 38-39: Sherman Montrose/Acme/AP/Polfoto, p. 40: Hulton/Getty Images, p. 40-41: Corbis/All Over Press, p. 41: Don Troiani/Corbis/All Over Press, p. 42: Ullstein/Polfoto, p. 42-43: Wikimedia, p. 43: Joe Scherschel/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images, www.learnnc.org, p. 44: Tom Lovell/Galerie Bilderwelt/Bridgeman, Ralph Morse/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images, p. 45: Johnny Shumate/Osprey, Johnny Shumate/Osprey, snyderstreasures.com, p. 46: AP/Polfoto, p. 46-47: Don Troiani/Corbis/All Over Press, p. 47: The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images.

## STRIKE TEAM MUST AVENGE PEARL HARBOR

P. 48-49: historyinfotos.com, p. 50: Topfoto/Polfoto, p. 50-51: Corbis/Getty Images, p. 51: U.S. Navy/Wikimedia, www.shotinthedark.info, p. 52: www.warreliefs.eu, p. 52-53: Imperial War Museums, p. 53: Wikimedia, NASA, www.gibson-barnes.com, p. 54: U.S. Air Force/Photo Researchers/Scanpix, p. 54-55: Lockheed, p. 55: www.usmilitariaforum.com, www.456fis.org, p. 56: historyinfotos.com, The Asahi Shimbun/Getty Images, p. 57: gizmodo.com, midway75.org.

## INDIAN RIDGE IS STALINGRAD OF THE EAST

P. 58-59: CI 692/Imperial War Museums, p. 60: Wikimedia, Wikimedia, p. 61: akg/Scanpix, p. 62: Mary Evans/Scanpix, p. 62-63: MH 4171/Imperial War Museums, p. 63: National Army Museum, London/Bridgeman, p. 64-65: warwall.ru, p. 65: www.the-saleroom.com, p. 66: Mondadori/Getty Images, INS 4074/Imperial War Museums, UNI 13846/Imperial War Museums, p. 67: IND 4592/Imperial War Museums.

## BASES BECOME SOLDIERS' SECOND HOME

P. 68-69: akg/Scanpix, p. 70: Joe Rosenthal/AP/Polfoto, AP/Polfoto, AP/Polfoto (samme foto, montage), p. 71: akg/Scanpix, akg/Scanpix, Interim Archives/Scanpix, www.ebay.com, p. 72: U.S. Air Force/AP/Polfoto, www.icollector.com, AP/Polfoto, AP/Polfoto, p. 73: www.ebay.com, www.ebay.com, akg/Scanpix, p. 74: hiveminer.com, U.S. Marine Corps/AP/Polfoto, U.S. Marine Corps/AP/Polfoto, p. 75: U.S. Marine Corps/AP/Polfoto, akg/Scanpix, U.S. Marine Corps/AP/Polfoto, Carl Mydans/Life/Getty Images.

## AMERICANS INVADE THE PHILIPPINES

P. 76-77: akg/Scanpix, p. 78: www.icollector.com, p. 79: www.flyingtigerssurplus.com, AP/Polfoto, p. 80-81: Keystone/Hulton Archive/Getty Images, p. 82: Ullstein/

Polfoto, p. 82-83: Higgins boat LVPC illustration Martijn Buijs/Forgotten Hope Team/www.fhmod.org/forgottenhope.warumdarum.de, Higgins boat bow ramp tegning Dean A. Beeman/http://gil-guy.com/id13.html, p. 83: Topfoto/Polfoto, welldonebadges.com, p. 84: Barrett Gallagher/Corbis/All Over Press, Victor Jorgensen/Corbis/All Over Press, p. 85: www.rootsweb.ancestry.com, 80-G-281660-2/U.S. Navy/NARA/Wikimedia.

## JAPAN'S PILOTS FLY TO THEIR DEATHS

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## CAPTIVE IN HELL

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## ATOM BOMBS END THE WAR

P. 104-105: Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum/Handout via Reuters/Reuters/Scanpix, p. 106: AP/Polfoto, p. 106-107: U.S. Air Force/Handout/AFP/Scanpix, p. 107: www.sim-outhouse.com, 98-15873/Eric Long/National Air and Space Museum/Smithsonian Institution, p. 108-109: Hiroshima Museum/NASA/U.S. Air Force/Tribune New Service, p. 109: Kimimasa Mayama/EPA/Scanpix, p. 110-111: Hiroshima Peace Museum/Handout/EPA/Scanpix, p. 110: Corbis/All Over Press, Corbis/All Over Press, p. 112: Universal History Archive/UiG/Bridgeman, p. 112-113: Donated by Nubuo TETSUTANI/Collection of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, p. 113: AFP/Scanpix.

## OFFICERS FIGHT TO THE DEATH

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# PACIFIC WAR

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# Japan's pre-emptive strike drew the US into the war

Early on 7th December, 1941 Japanese bombs rained down on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The following day, President Roosevelt declared war on Japan. The empire had drawn a vengeful opponent into the war. But before Tokyo's surrender four years later, the Land of the Rising Sun would set East Asia on fire. In India, a British garrison fought valiantly against the superpower, while huge aircraft carriers clashed in bloody sea battles.

